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The New Criterion

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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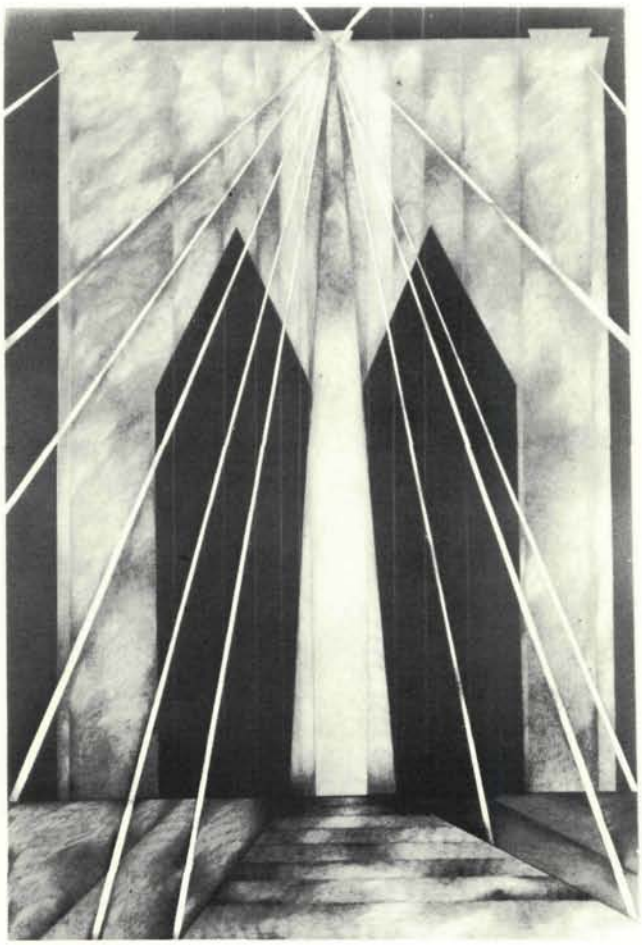

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Criticism endowed: reflections on a debacle

by Hilton Kramer

"All this talk about good writing," the speaker declared, "sounds very fascistic to me." It was a remark guaranteed to stir the memory of at least one member of the "seminar" to which it was addressed. Years before, in the palmy days of the counterculture (as it was then called), a writer named Ellen Willis had earned a modicum of notoriety by solemnly confiding to the readers of *The New American Review* that—I quote from memory—"There is a saying in the movement that good writing is counterrevolutionary." Later on, I believe, Miss Willis publicly disavowed this remarkable doctrine. Perhaps she had found it cast an invidious light on the contributions she was then making to *The New Yorker* and *The Village Voice*. But there can be little doubt that she had reported the doctrine itself with complete accuracy, and here it was again, these many years later, looming in an unlikely circumstance.

For on this occasion we were a long way —or so one might have thought—from the "movement" of the Sixties. We were seated around a capacious conference table in the headquarters of the National Endowment for the Arts in the third year of the Reagan administration. We had been brought together for a two-day "seminar" on art criticism—or, more precisely, on government subsidies to art critics. For more than a decade the NEA had been giving money—not tremendous sums, to be sure, but public money all the same—to writers, editors, and sundry others under an art critics fellowship program, and the time had come (or so we were informed in the words of the official memorandum) to "focus on the nature, needs and problems of arts criticism" and "advise the Program concerning future support to this activity and possible new program initiatives."

Among the "problems" that quickly emerged as central to the deliberations of this official "seminar," none inspired a more heated discussion than this problem of "good writing." To require such a thing of art criticism—or at least of art criticism that is funded by public money—was deemed by most of the more outspoken participants in the discussion to be an intolerable idea, at best the sign of a degraded "philistine" or "middlebrow" taste and at worst an outright threat to some of the basic freedoms guaranteed to us by our political system. It was really quite amazing to hear speaker after speaker—university professors, magazine editors, etc., the kind of people whom students and readers look to for intellectual guidance—deliver passionate attacks on the notion that clarity might be a desirable attribute in critical discourse. Yet the denunciations flowed on a tide of indignant feeling, and it was mainly on this issue of clarity that the "problem" of "good writing" came to rest. For—interestingly—no one seemed to doubt that in criticism there might exist some ineluctable relation between clarity and good writing, and it was precisely *that*

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which provoked so much dread and opposition among the speakers. I doubt if a greater degree of moral indignation would have been aroused by a discussion of censorship or a witch-hunt. Come to think of it, clarity in criticism was debated at times quite as if it *were* a discussion of censorship, and certain speakers made it abundantly clear that, in their view, the very fact that an issue like clarity could even be broached on this occasion was evidence enough that a witch-hunt of some sort was already upon us. Thus, when Linda Frye Burnham, the editor of a journal called *High Performance,* declared on the second day of the conference that "All this talk about good writing sounds very fascistic to me," she was only summarizing—a little more vividly, perhaps, than she intended—the spirit of the preceding debate.

To understand how all this could have happened—how ostensibly intelligent people, professionally engaged in writing or thinking about the visual arts, could bring themselves to such a preposterous pass—it is necessary to know something about the participants in the NEA "seminar," and something too about the curious history of the Endowment's art critics fellowship program. That the program itself has been something of a disaster was tacitly acknowledged by the Endowment when it suspended fellowship grants to art critics in 1981 and commissioned an outside writer to look into what, if anything, this outflow of money had achieved. It was the preparation of this report, written by John Beardsley, a critic and curator who was himself the recipient of a small grant ($1,000) under the program in 1979, that occasioned the present seminar. Yet in a typical bureaucratic maneuver, the program for awarding fellowship grants to art critics was reinstituted for the fiscal years 1983-1984 well in advance of Mr. Beardsley's report, and the lucky recipients of the new round of grants will be receiving even larger sums than have gone to critics in the past—another example, I suppose, of nothing succeeding like failure. All of this naturally lent to the discussion of Mr. Beardsley's report—the major item on the agenda for the second morning of the meeting—a certain air of unreality, and all the more so since his report was absolutely devastating in the highly specific criticisms it made of virtually every aspect of the fellowship program.

On the matter of Mr. Beardsley's report, and of the group's response to it, there will be more to say presently. But let us look first at the roster of participants who had been invited to sit in judgment on this report and "advise" the NEA on the future of the fellowship program. Of the twenty-four critics, non-critics, and anti-critics who had been invited to take part in this seminar, at least ten had either received money under the fellowship program or had served as panelists (that is, jurors voting on grants) for fellowships or both. How many others had received money or represented institutions receiving money under other NEA programs it was not in every case deemed appropriate to disclose. Thus, at the very least close to half of the participants in this so-called seminar were either direct beneficiaries of the NEA's program or had a voice in shaping the program, or both.[1] One could imagine the outcry that would greet a conference called to sit in judgment and "advise" the White House, say, or General Motors or your local police department on one of its most dubious programs that was found to consist so largely of the program's mentors and/or beneficiaries. The air would be so thick with accusations of conflicts of interest that the whole procedure would be instantly disbanded and discredited. For those attending this meeting, however, the very concept of a conflict of interest seemed not to exist. Not surprisingly, most of those who served as panelists for the art critics fellowship program or had been recipients of fellowship money thought the program was a wonderful thing, and they fought like tigers for its continuation.

How, then, did this wonderful program

1 In fact a clear majority of the participants were or had been either beneficiaries, consultants, or panelists in one or another program of the NEA.

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actually work? Oddly enough, it turned out that one did not actually have to be an art critic with a sustained record of publication in order to receive a fellowship under this program or to serve as a panelist awarding fellowships to others. It was apparently enough to have the right connections. In 1975, for example, John Coplans, the former editor of *Artforum* who has lately emerged as a photographer and now exhibits his pictures in a prestigious Fifty-seventh Street gallery, was given a grant of $5,000. And in 1981, with the world still waiting to read what Mr. Coplans might write if he ever turned his talents to criticism, he was given a second grant of $10,000. Not that Mr. Coplans was special in this respect; he was only luckier in winning rather larger sums than some of the other non-critics who received fellowship money. May N. Tabak, for example, received only $1,000 in 1975, but perhaps as a consolation she was invited to serve as a panelist for the 1980 fellowships. Miss Tabak is certainly no stranger to the world of art criticism. As the widow of the late Harold Rosenberg, she can be assumed to be acquainted with it. But her own contribution to criticism remains, like Mr. Coplans's, more than a little obscure. It is not irrelevant, perhaps, to point out that the panelists who took this rather liberal view of the critical vocation in awarding the fellowships in 1975 were Elizabeth Baker, Lucy Lippard, and Peter Plagens, all of them recipients of fellowships in other years.

Which brings us to one of the other outstanding features of the fellowship program: the mutual-admiration principle that seems to have governed so many of its decisions. Thus, when Cecile McCann served as a panelist in 1976, one of the $5,000 fellowships went to Lucy Lippard. (Lippard had been awarded an earlier fellowship in the amount of $3,000 in 1972.) This was only fair, I suppose, since in 1975, when Lucy Lippard served as a panelist, Cecile McCann had been given a $5,000 fellowship. This was often the way the program worked. It wasn't exactly a closed shop, to be sure. Numerous people one had never heard of—itself an oddity in the small world of art criticism[2]—were also given fellowships over the years. But at the core of the program there was certainly a nucleus of friends and professional colleagues who were assiduous in looking after each other's interests. In fact the record suggests that the whole fellowship program functioned as a kind of private club to which a number of outside guests—always carefully selected on the basis of geography, race, and gender—were each year invited.

There was, moreover, no discernible intellectual standard applied to the granting of the art critics fellowships. It was on this point that Mr. Beardsley's report was particularly emphatic. "It is . . . with no little sense of disappointment that I begin writing this evaluation of the Art Critics Fellowship program," he remarked in the opening paragraph of his report, and then went on to offer the following reflections:

> . . . it is my observation that this program fails to achieve the standards of other Endowment activities. In part, this merely reflects the generally lamentable quality of recent visual arts criticism. But the problem is compounded by a lack of clarity within the [NEA's] Visual Arts Program of the objectives of the fellowships for art critics, and by the tendency of panelists to overlook the principal stated criterion of quality in favor of less important considerations. These have the consequence of undermining the cause of an intelligible and widely disseminated criticism, replacing it with one that is of benefit and interest to an ever narrower group. While there is no doubt that these

2 Exactly how many art critics there might be at the present moment was a matter of some dispute. Kenneth S. Friedman, publisher of *The Art Economist* and author of a "position paper" commissioned for the seminar, stunned the meeting by reporting that his "research" could account for some twenty-five hundred art critics currently at work. I think it is fair to say that this figure was regarded as a wild exaggeration—a case of statistics being able to prove anything.

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> grants provide a psychological and financial boost to their recipients, there is little evidence that they positively affect the character and quantity of the recipients' work, and even less that they help to raise the standards of art criticism more generally.

Mr. Beardsley went on to point out—with remarkable restraint, I think—that "In a discipline as narrow as art criticism, a strict adherence to the peer panel review system makes it very difficult to find panelists who are at once knowledgeable and disinterested." For this and other reasons, he was clearly troubled by the concept as well as the execution of the program.

> Two major questions still loom in my mind. First, is there a large enough group of good critical writers to justify giving awards that are largely honorary in effect, if not in intent? I am not at all certain. Second, if the major objective of the critics fellowship program is, as stated in the 1972 Council pages, to enhance professionalism and raise standards of quality, has the program achieved that objective? The answer to this is a less equivocal no.

And if there was no intellectual standard governing the program, was there then a discernible political bias at work in the fellowship awards? Mr. Beardsley spoke of the "recurring desire to support alternative publications," and went on to point out that "specific ideological biases were more pronounced in 1979 than in other years." (It was in 1979 that the program awarded more fellowships than in any other year of its existence.) "The 1979 panel," Mr. Beardsley wrote, "seemed bent upon correcting at one sitting two centuries of male dominated, geographically centered criticism." One of the panelists for that ill-fated year told the seminar that the 1979 panel had been bluntly instructed at the outset not to give too many fellowships to white males. But it would be unfair to single out 1979 as a special year on political grounds. My own impression, after studying the list of fellowships from 1972 onward, is that a great many of them went as a matter of course to people who were publicly opposed to just about every policy of the United States government except the one that put money in their own pockets or the pockets of their friends and political associates. In this respect, it is worth noting that there seemed to be an annual fellowship reserved—unofficially no doubt—for one or another writer for *The Village Voice*.

To say that the seminar largely rejected Mr. Beardsley's findings would be an understatement. Donald B. Kuspit, recipient of a 1977 fellowship and author of one of the "position papers" commissioned for the meeting, described Mr. Beardsley's report as a "slander." Others used stronger language. The report had, after all, severely criticized decisions many of them had made and work that many of them had done, and there is nothing these critics dislike more than criticism of themselves. By and large, however, much of Mr. Beardsley's report—despite the hue and cry raised against it—went undiscussed. He was often attacked, but the issues he raised were rarely engaged. Most of those present were pleased with the program as it was, and were more concerned to safeguard it than to analyze or question it.

To give the meeting some semblance of intellectual seriousness there were of course those "position papers," the discussion of which occupied a good deal of time. Mr. Kuspit's was called "Two Modes of Art Criticism," and in it he juxtaposed something called "esthetic criticism" (which was thought to be bad) with something called "Bildung criticism" (which was thought to be good). Reading his paper and listening to its author enlarge upon it, one could certainly understand his opposition to clarity in critical discourse. Another vocal opponent of clarity, Rosalind Krauss—recipient of a fellowship in 1975 and a panelist in 1977—contributed a paper called "Regarding 'Marginal' Criticism." Its general spirit may be gleaned in the epigraph it bore from Jean François Lyotard: "Masculine imperialism either relegates women to its borders or, if it educates them, makes them homologues of

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men." It was an exercise in feminist nihilism feebly attempting to disguise itself as critical theory. Adrian Piper, described as having "produced conceptual, performance, and political art since 1968" and the recipient of NEA fellowships in 1979 and 1982 (though not from the art critics program), offered a paper called "Critical Hegemony and the Division of Labor in Art," which was unalloyed politics hardly even attempting to disguise itself as anything else. Douglas Davis, a senior writer for *Newsweek,* a 1981 panelist for the art critics program, recipient of an NEA artists fellowship, and director of something called the International Network for the Arts, composed a lengthy opus entitled "The Contemporary Audience: the Radical Bourgeoisie," which was more politics. In none of these "position papers" was the subject of art discussed.

It was, then, from such disinterested minds that the NEA seminar on art criticism was expected to find guidance in discussing the future of the art critics fellowship program, and thus "advise" the NEA on the wisest course of action. I have no doubt that the organizers of the seminar got exactly the results they were looking for. Whatever "new program initiatives" might now be introduced into the program, it is clear that the same people and the same values will remain in charge. We were not, after all, as distant from the "movement" of the Sixties as one might have thought. The only difference was that the "movement" was now on the inside, running or advising the bureaucracy, instead of being on the outside making demands. And it isn't only art criticism, of course, that can be counted among the casualties of this turn of events.

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A love of ruins: the art of Philip Pearlstein
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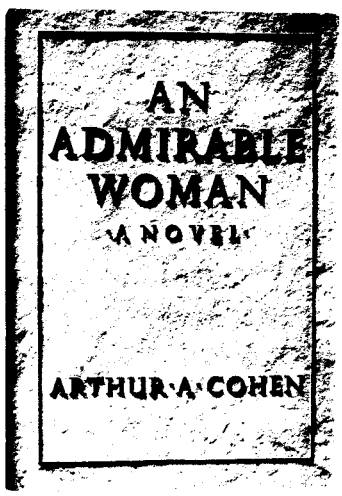

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Marriage and morals among the Victorians

by Gertrude Himmelfarb

When Lytton Strachey was asked to propose a toast to his *Eminent Victorians,* he quoted an eminent Victorian biographer: "When I hear men called 'judicious' I suspect them; but when I hear them called 'judicious and venerable,' I know they are scoundrels." Strachey amended this to describe his own credo: "When I hear people called 'Victorians,' I suspect them. But when I hear them called 'eminent Victorians,' I write their lives."

Strachey wrote their lives to expose them, to reveal the private lives behind their public façades, the private vices that belied their public virtues. His book, published toward the end of the First World War, was his personal declaration of war (he refused to serve in his country's war) against the Victorian pieties and hypocrisies, as he saw them, which still governed society—and which also governed the writing of biography, those multivolume tomes that told everything about their subjects except the essential truth. A later generation, further removed from the Victorians and still more removed from the Victorian mode of biography, has learned to be wary of the "essential" truth conveyed by the Strachey technique: the derisory physical detail (Thomas Arnold's legs, which were "shorter than they should have been"); the revealing *mise-en-scène* (the open Bible and the open brandy bottle on General Gordon's table); the list of peculiar names ("St. Bega, St. Adamnan, St. Gundleus, St. Guthlake, Brother Drithelm . . ."), which makes a mockery not only of the *Lives of the Saints* but of the idea of sainthood. We are now as apt to be suspicious of Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* as he was of the eminent Victorians themselves.

For all his irreverence, however, Strachey did the Victorians the honor of dealing with those aspects of their lives that made them eminent; it was their moral earnestness, their military heroism, their social service, their religious piety that he ridiculed. And his ridicule was so patent that the reader knew it for that, knew that the public persona was being measured against the private, and by that standard found wanting. More recently it has become the fashion to dwell on the private lives of historical figures, not in order to illuminate, or even to expose, their public lives but to discover some truth that is essentially private, and as true of a public or historical person as of an ordinary, private person. If the eminent continue to be the subject of study, it is because they are so eminently accessible; they have left so much more evidence than the "anonymous masses." There may not even be—as there was in Strachey's case—any animus against the eminent, any desire to condemn or ridicule them. Yet they are inevitably diminished when that which is peculiarly great about them, which made them public figures in their time and historic personages in ours, is ignored.

Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages, by Phyllis Rose, is a case study of the new

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mode of inquiry.[1] The title itself is suggestive. Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Greeks and Romans,* the author reminds us, was meant to instruct the reader about the "perils and pitfalls of public life"; the present volume is meant to do the same about domestic life. The five Victorian marriages that bear the burden of this task are not meant to typify the domestic life of the Victorians. They are, indeed, the most unrepresentative couples one can imagine, both because of the eminence of at least one of the partners and because of the peculiarity of the partnership. The five are the Carlyles, the Ruskins, the Mills, the Dickenses, and George Eliot and George Henry Lewes. To anyone having the least acquaintance with Victorian literature, these couples are notorious for the "irregularity"—that wonderful Victorian word—of their relationships. Two pairs (the Carlyles and Ruskins) never consummated their marriages; one (Eliot and Lewes) lived together without benefit of marriage; another (the Mills) had a long-standing, intimate (if platonic) relationship while she was married to another man; and still another (the Dickenses) were separated when he fell in love with another woman. The author explains that she chose these particular subjects "on the grounds of variety and intrinsic narrative interest," which prompts one to wonder why she left out that other deviant variety not uncommon at the time, the homosexual. Or, for that matter, that still more common (but less commonly written about) variety, the legally married, sexually compatible, devoted, loving couple, some examples of which (the Darwins come to mind) are not without their "intrinsic narrative interest."

Phyllis Rose is quite right; these are intrinsically interesting stories quite apart from what might be deduced from them. She is also quite right to apologize, as she does repeatedly, for their familiarity; she adds nothing of substance to other published accounts and, in the brief space available to each, can hardly do justice to the complications that elsewhere occupy entire volumes. For the most part she is content to recount these oft told tales in a straightforward, uncontentious way, happily free of the psychological jargon that such marital and sexual deviations normally invite (and only occasionally lapsing into some jarring bit of slang, such as, "You have to hand it to Harriet"). Yet she does have something new to say—new, that is, in the context of Victorian literature although not new in the context of feminist literature.

The thesis is stated boldly in the prologue and emerges at crucial points in the course of the book. Marriage—or "parallel lives," as Rose prefers, emphasizing the separateness of the partners—is a political experience, indeed "the primary political experience in which most of us engage as adults." Like any political experience it involves the "management of power" and "balance of power," power in this case having to do with the "priority of desires" of the two partners. A marriage is sustained so long as there is a mutual understanding of the terms of that balance of power and mutual gains to be derived from it; it fails when the terms are violated or are no longer satisfactory, when "the weaker member feels exploited or the stronger feels unrewarded for his or her strength." Love is the mask used to "disguise transactions involving power"; it is the "ideological bone thrown to women to distract their attention from the powerlessness of their lives." It may momentarily "inhibit the process of power negotiation," thus promoting the "illusion of equality so characteristic of lovers." If the inhibition comes from within, it is "one of life's graces and blessings." But if, as is often the case, it comes from without, if it is "culturally induced" or desired more by one sex than by the other, it is a "mask for exploitation."

It is a powerful thesis (the pun is irresistible), powerfully stated, with some interesting turns to redeem it from banality. Divorce, for example, Rose argues, so far from ameliorating or correcting the inequities of marriage, compounds them—which does not mean, she hastens to add, that she would

1 *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages,* by Phyllis Rose. Alfred A. Knopf, 320 pages, $16.95

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like less divorce, only less marriage. "Bad enough to choose once in a lifetime whom to live with; to go on choosing, to reaffirm one's choice day after day, as one must when it is culturally possible to divorce, is really asking a lot of people." It was better in the old days, "indissoluble unions" were combined with "a great deal of civilized behavior—in other words, secrecy, even lying—for the sake of harmony." Or, better yet, the way of the future: "frankly personal unions entered into personally, with carefully articulated and individualized pledges of fidelity, if any."

In view of the boldness of the thesis, one may be surprised that it appears only occasionally in the course of the book. Yet it is precisely its boldness that makes it relatively unintrusive. If every kind of marriage—regardless of the peculiarities of character, circumstance, sentiment, or sexual disposition—is a form of "sexual politics," the author need only record the manifold ways in which these "imaginative projections and arrangements of power" reveal themselves. She can tolerantly describe sexless marriages as "examples of flexibility rather than of abnormality." And she can sympathize with those unwittingly caught up in these power relationships, the exploited and the exploiters alike being victims of an institution that was more powerful than they, that oppressed them even as they oppressed their mates.

There is another reason why the thesis is more prominent in the prologue than in the rest of the book or more prominent in some chapters than in others: it is so often irrelevant to the case in point. If it appears hardly at all in the chapter on the Ruskins, it is because the only kind of power that is at issue here is sexual potency, in which Ruskin was sadly lacking, and this is not, presumably, what Rose has in mind when she speaks of marriage as a "projection" of power. Ruskin did not even exercise power in the sense of trying to keep his wife when she decided to leave him. He did not contest the annulment, and he continued to sit for his portrait by Millais who even then showed an unseemly interest in Mrs. Ruskin and who was later to marry her. But if the author does not make much here of the idea of power, she does use Ruskin's impotence as the occasion for generalizations about the sex life of the Victorians.

Ruskin's was a notorious case in his own time and continues to fascinate biographers. And for good reason—it is not often that the subject of a biography provides so many titillating details about his intimate life. In a letter to his lawyer Ruskin explained that he did not consummate his marriage on his wedding night because he was repelled by the sight of his wife's body. There was something wrong with it, he felt; it was not as he had imagined it; it was "not formed to excite passion." One theory has it that he was repelled especially by her pubic hair and possibly by her breasts, his image of the female body having derived from the highly idealized, desexualized nudes he was familiar with in paintings and statues. This would also explain his later attraction to little girls not marred by the unsightly evidence of maturity. Rose is intrigued by this explanation: it offers proof of the "radical innocence" of the Victorians and, better yet, of the power of art over experience. Unfortunately, she adds, it was probably not true, Ruskin having told his parents that he had seen pictures of "naked bawds" while at Oxford. (And were those painted nudes—by Raphael or Rubens, for example—as unsexual and immature as this theory supposes?)

In any event, Rose professes to be less interested in what was peculiar about Ruskin's wedding night than in what was typical about it, the light it sheds on "Victorian sexuality." Thus she interrupts the story of the Ruskins to discourse on the ignorance and inexperience that made the "Victorian wedding night" a "barbaric trial" for at least the woman and sometimes the man as well. That experience was all the worse because sexual relations, having been utterly forbidden before marriage, became an absolute requirement after marriage, a certain prescription for impotence and frigidity. While

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the Ruskins were not, Rose grants, a representative couple, she believes their plight to have been "probably less extraordinary and eccentric than one might think at first." Were it not for a footnote citation at this point, one might let this statement pass for the speculation it frankly is. But the citation itself, raising the expectation of proof, only makes the generalization more dubious. For the footnote refers to a similar and even more unsubstantiated speculation concerning an equally unrepresentative and thoroughly un-Victorian figure, the American poet Delmore Schwartz.

In fact, the question of proof is almost irrelevant, for the thesis is so comprehensive that it can accommodate itself to any form of sexual or domestic behavior, anything that might pass for normality or abnormality, any kind of adjustment or maladjustment, any evidence of frigidity or fertility. If marriage itself is anomalous, if the legal commitment itself taints any relationship, then any of its manifestations must be equally anomalous. The footnote about Delmore Schwartz, for example, goes on to explain that even now, when premarital sex is the rule rather than the exception, there may be "wedding-night trauma," although of a different kind. "Can society's sudden approval quench one's private pleasures as society's disapproval did before?" It is not clear what is meant by "society's sudden approval," if indeed premarital sex is so prevalent and acceptable. But one takes the point: a permissive society creates its own traumas—and not only, one may add, on the wedding night but also during that supposedly voluntary, spontaneous, premarital period unfettered by legal bonds.

If some Victorians were rendered impotent by the prevailing sexual code and marital fetters, others, brought up under that same code and bound by the same ties, were evidently sexually stimulated to a degree that could not be contained within marriage. Charles Dickens was one such. After twenty-two years of marriage and ten children, Dickens moved out of his home, arranged for a legal separation from his wife, and entered into a long-standing affair with the actress Ellen Ternan. The situation was one that might have been expected to evoke sympathy from a commentator who takes so dim a view of marriage, who thinks "personal unions" more meaningful than legal ones, and who recommends, in the absence of such an enlightened alternative, marriage combined with "a great deal of civilized behavior"—i.e., affairs.

Dickens was twenty-four when he married, his wife twenty-one. Within nine months of their wedding, their first child was born and his first successful book published. Thereafter he sired as many books as children, each book taking him further away from a wife who was ineffectual even in the household, still more so in the literary and social world (to say nothing of the private, creative world) inhabited by England's premier novelist. It was an all too familiar, and not peculiarly Victorian, situation, and Dickens handled it in the all too familiar way, with protestations of innocence and professions of outrage that he should be so maligned as to be accused of having an affair. Rose admits that Dickens's life after the separation was far happier than it had been before, and confesses some sympathy for his "flailing against middle age and domesticity," for "living as though no one had ever lived before." She concludes, however, by saying that in his own time he was a model of "ungentlemanly behavior" and in ours a "fine example of how not to end a marriage." The rebuke is worthy of a good Victorian, but it comes oddly from an opponent of marriage and a proponent of sexual liberty. One wonders whether she would have been so severe on a wife who exhibited such "unladylike behavior"?

Another kind of double standard is evident in the discussion of the Mills. Here the wife was not the pathetic, vulnerable partner but the aggressive, dominant one. Rose does not conceal her distaste for Harriet Taylor, later Harriet Mill, who manipulated both her husbands with as fine a disregard for their sensibilities as for the conventions, whose domestic bullying was matched only

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by her intellectual arrogance, and whose self-esteem was as inordinate as Mill's uxoriousness. It was she who read and approved of those extraordinary passages in Mill's *Autobiography* in which he praised her as a being superior to himself intellectually, emotionally, and aesthetically, someone whose mind was able to penetrate into the "highest regions of speculation" as well as into the "smallest practical concerns of daily life." Shelley was but a child "in thought and intellect" compared with her; Carlyle could only be interpreted "by one greatly the superior to us both—who was more a poet than he, and more a thinker than I"; Coleridge and the German poets and philosophers were an amalgam of truth and error, whereas in her "I could not, as I had done in those others, detect any mixture of error"; his own father had no equal among men and "but one among women." After that it comes almost as an anticlimax to find Mill endowing her with "excellencies" so unique that "the highest poetry, philosophy, oratory, or art, seemed trivial by the side of her, and equal only to expressing some small part of her mind." Nor is it surprising to find him altering crucial passages in his *Principles of Political Economy,* against his own judgment and in spite of the logic of the argument of the book, for no "other reason than the certainty I feel that I never should long continue of an opinion different from yours on a subject which you have fully considered."

Rose does not cite all of these quotations, or the many others to the same effect. But she quotes enough to show that she is well aware of Mill's self-deception and self-abasement. "How splendid it would be," she observes ruefully, "if we could find in the Mills' marriage what they hoped we would find, an exemplary model." In fact what she finds is a reversal of the patriarchal model: "A female autocrat replaced the usual male." Here she seems to be echoing Mill's friends, one of whom described him as in a "state of subjection" to his wife (an ironic play on Mill's famous essay "The Subjection of Women"). But unlike his friends who thought this a violation of the natural order of things, and unlike some later commentators who thought it a violation of his own principle of the "perfect equality" of the sexes, Rose makes of it a higher principle, a more advanced form of equality. Mill must have been aware, she argues, that he was "altering the usual allocation of power between the sexes" by claiming to be his wife's inferior and "interpreter." But it was precisely because this situation was so unusual that the "great experiment" of the Mills, the creation of "a true marriage of equals," required unusual measures. Recalling Orwell's *Animal Farm* (but without his irony), Rose explains that "for Harriet to be anywhere near equal she had to be 'more than equal.'" Or, she suggests, adopting the current version of Orwell's dictum: "Think of it as a domestic case of affirmative action. To achieve equality, more power had to go to Harriet, in compensation for the inequality of their conditions."

It is curious to find, in a book so insistently political in its interpretation of marriage, so little interest in the actual political views (or, for that matter, ideas of any kind) of the subjects. Was there a correlation between liberalism and marital liberality? Between radicalism and sexual liberation? Between conservatism and domestic authoritarianism? Even within the limited scope of this book, in the lives and minds of these five couples, there is matter enough for speculation, if not for generalization. Ruskin, Dickens, Mill, Eliot, Carlyle—they were all people of strong political convictions. Yet only in the case of Carlyle does politics come to the fore, and then only in terms of a specific incident, the famous Eyre case.

Edward Eyre was the colonial governor of Jamaica in 1865 when a Negro riot resulted in the death or torture of dozens of white settlers. In suppressing the riot (which Eyre declared to be a rebellion), government troops killed almost a hundred Negroes, court-martialed and executed hundreds more, and flogged and tortured still others. When news of this event reached England, it

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provoked a heated controversy that went on for years in the press and Parliament, and that was not quelled by the appointment of a Royal Commission or by the dismissal of Eyre. To Rose, the two sides in the controversy appear as a lineup of "two hockey teams ranged for the face-off." Opposing Eyre were the "liberals and scientific progressives": Mill, Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Lewes, Leslie Stephen; siding with him were the "romantic authoritarians": Carlyle, Dickens, Ruskin, Tennyson, Tyndall, Kingsley. To a knowledgeable reader the names themselves suggest the inadequacy of these labels. But Rose sees the affair as symptomatic of all the "great democratic movements" of the century—"emancipation, nationalism, universal suffrage, women's rights, even trade unionism"—in all of which progressives sought a redistribution of power while authoritarians claimed the status quo to be "divinely ordained." Since marriage is also a matter of the distribution of power, it follows that political authoritarians would naturally be domestic tyrants or patriarchs.

It is an intriguing idea—or would be if there were any serious attempt to demonstrate the correlation between sex and politics. Were trade unionists, for example, better husbands, fathers, and lovers than non-trade unionists? Or the supporters of Italian independence than those opposed or indifferent to it? Or little-Englanders than imperialists? Or, to be more specific, Gladstone than Disraeli? Is the correlation even true of the subjects of this book? Was Eliot being patriarchal when she opposed female suffrage, as she did? Or Ruskin when he permitted his wife to leave and gave her an uncontested annulment? Or Carlyle when he married so strong-minded a woman and made no attempt to curb her tongue and pen—indeed, urged her to read and write, and not casually, as was her wont, but seriously and systematically?

And what of Jane Carlyle herself, who did not, in spite of her husband's encouragement, do any serious writing but who did have strong opinions and was in the habit of expressing them forcefully? She, it appears, was as vehement a supporter of Eyre as he was, and she evidently came to this position on her own. At a dinner party, in the absence of her husband, she found herself engaged in conversation with an irate man who would have liked to see Eyre, as she reported it, "cut into small pieces and eaten raw."

> He told me *women* might patronize Eyre—that women were naturally cruel, and rather liked to look on while horrors were perpetrated. But no *man* living could stand up for Eyre now! "I hope Mr. Carlyle does," I said. "I haven't had an opportunity of asking him; but I should be surprised and grieved if I found him sentimentalising over a pack of black brutes!"

Yet it is Jane Carlyle who emerges, only a few pages after this quotation, as the author's principal "heroine," and this in the closing sentences of the book where the statement carries the largest weight.

> Feisty Jane went down fighting, demanding equal time, and writing about it all in marvelous prose which just might outlast her husband's. Because of her, the Carlyles' marriage seems, in the strange afterlife which literature grants, to be also a marriage of equals, where equality consists—as perhaps it must, in an imperfect time such as hers, or ours—in perpetual resistance, perpetual rebellion.

"Feisty Jane" indeed! Few men today would dare write so condescendingly of a woman.[2] Or, again condescendingly, to make so little of her opinions (as in the Eyre case) while making so much of her husband's. Or to credit her with qualities she patently did not have while denying others she did have. Yes, she wrote marvelous prose —but better than his? Are her letters, witty

2 And it is odd to find so ardent a feminist consistently first-naming the women but not the men. Throughout the book the couples appear as Jane and Carlyle, Effie and Ruskin, Harriet and Mill, Catherine and Dickens. Only George Eliot is spared, perhaps because of the masculinity of her pseudonym.

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and entertaining as they are, likely to outlast his essays and histories? And the "equality" that consists in "perpetual resistance, perpetual rebellion"—does that really describe a woman who devoted herself tirelessly to her husband's needs and comforts, who ingeniously, selflessly protected him from the intrusions of servants, workmen, and visitors, from the noises of the street and the crowing of the cocks, who put up with his crotchets and rages, with his sexual impotence and, finally, with his liaison with Lady Ashburton, which, although platonic, was as close as he could get to having an affair? Confronted with less cause for grievance, Effie Ruskin did in fact resist and rebel, to the point of leaving her husband, marrying another man (her husband's friend), and proceeding to have the children she had always desired. Jane Carlyle took out her misery and resentment in acidulous conversation and correspondence, and (when the Ashburton affair was at its worst) in a diary which she left for Carlyle to find after her death. There is a good deal to admire in Jane Carlyle, but it is not the "equality" that comes from resistance and rebellion; rather it is the love and devotion that transcended all the difficulties and frustrations of her life. It is only in this last sense, a Victorian sense of the word, that she truly qualifies as a "heroine."

The more obvious heroine and hero of the book are George Eliot and George Henry Lewes, whose "devotion, stability, and equality grew outside the bounds of legal marriage." To be sure, this was a matter of necessity rather than preference. When George Eliot—Marian Evans as she then was—met Lewes, he was married, the father of three children, and unable to get a divorce because he had condoned his wife's affair with his friend Thornton Hunt. (Hunt, with whom Mrs. Lewes had another three children, was himself married to another woman.) It was a rather free and easy circle in which Lewes moved. But there was nothing free and easy about Marian Evans or about her relationship with Lewes. For twenty-four years, until his death, they lived together as monogamously and properly as the most Victorian couple, with the small exception that they were not legally married.

To Rose it is the fact that they were not legally married that makes them her "favorite couple," the happiest couple she knows "outside of fantasy literature." Because of their "ostracism" from society, they were totally drawn in on each other, totally occupied with the books they had in lieu of children, totally united in purpose and interests. This was possible only because they were spared the "burdens of respectability" —being nice to each other's friends, giving dinner parties, having weekend guests, appearing together in public. "Treated as sinful lovers, they remained lovers." They did not have to waste their energies "wishing themselves more free"; they had only to expend their energies enjoying their freedom in solitude, devoting themselves to each other and to their work.

This is as extraordinary a vision of marital (or extramarital) bliss as it is of human freedom. To think it liberating not to have children or friends, or admirable to shun society and public life, is a remarkable message to draw from this relationship. But it is the author's message, not her subjects'. When Eliot professed to be well rid of the "petty worldly torments" of society and the chatter of "frivolous women," or when she pretended not to mind when Lewes failed in his attempt to get a divorce abroad, she was obviously trying to put the best face on a situation that she found most distasteful. And she was not nearly as reclusive as is made out here. She broke with some friends but retained others and made many new ones; she went to concerts and the opera, dined out and had dinner guests, and held regular Saturday evening or Sunday afternoon "at homes." So far from not being "received in society," as Rose says, she was received in the highest society, including nobility and royalty. If she was ostracized by some she was lionized by many others. And if Lewes often went to parties without her, it was because she chose

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not to go, not because she was uninvited.

Nor did Eliot enjoy the freedom of not being married. That freedom was more onerous to her than any of the "burdens of respectability" of which she is presumed to have been happily relieved. Indeed she voluntarily assumed the stigmata of respectability. She publicly referred to Lewes as her "husband" and to herself as his "wife," signed her letters "Marian Lewes," asked her friends to address her as "Mrs. Lewes," and had the satisfaction of having the real Mrs. Lewes do just that. (As if to reinforce the surname, she also took Lewes's first name as her pseudonym.) These are not the actions of a woman cherishing her independence, rebelling against law and convention, resisting the bonds of matrimony. And when those bonds were dissolved with the death of Lewes, she took the first opportunity to disburden herself of her freedom. A year and a half after his death she married John Cross. That legal marriage shocked her friends as much as her earlier nonmarriage had—because of the discrepancy of age (she was sixty, he forty), because of the excessive propriety of the event (the preparation of clothes as for a trousseau, the formal marriage in church, the honeymoon), and because he was not only very much her junior but also conspicuously her intellectual inferior. The intellectual partnership that may serve to explain and justify her relationship with Lewes can hardly be invoked in the case of Cross. What Cross did provide, however, was what was so important to her: a total, unequivocal commitment, the kind she had been fortunate enough to have from Lewes despite the fact that they were not married, and which was now all the more compelling because it had the sanction of society and of the law.

It is of Eliot, but implicitly of all her subjects, that Rose puts the question:

> What makes a marriage valid? its endorsement by church or state? or the commitment of the people involved? That was the question her behavior posed, and her radical stance was calculated to undermine morality as it had been known and to re-establish it on a more serious, more existential, basis.

In fact, Eliot's behavior—and Mill's and Dickens's and Ruskin's and Carlyle's—was calculated to do just the opposite: to strengthen "morality as it had been known" and to re-establish it on a more serious, a more *philosophical,* basis.

In each case the violation of conventional morality was made to appear the exception that proved the rule. Mill and Harriet Taylor did not deliberately choose to defy convention; they did so reluctantly and regretfully, only because she happened to be married to another man. When her husband died, they delayed their marriage for almost two years in order to observe a proper period of mourning. And when they did get married, Mill was absurdly anxious about the perfect legality of the ceremony. He had happened to sign the marriage register, "J. S. Mill," which was the form he used in writing, and when the clerk told him that his full name was required, he squeezed in the missing letters. A year later, haunted by the thought that his signature had been faulty, he wrote his wife a formal letter suggesting that they go through a church ceremony "so that hereafter no shadow of a doubt on the subject can ever arise." For once his wife was more sensible than he and prevailed upon him not to take a step that would expose them to ridicule. But he carefully kept that letter among his effects as a written record of his intentions.

Nor did Dickens flaunt his affair with Ellen Ternan; indeed he publicly denied it. Even after his separation from his wife (which was itself conducted with a scrupulous regard for convention), he did not openly live with Ellen Ternan, and his relationship with her, so far as is known, was monogamous. So too Ruskin and Carlyle. Their sexual problems were not of their choosing, and insofar as they were capable of it, they tried to maintain the fiction of normality and conventionality. In the case of the Carlyles, they did succeed in maintain-

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ing it, at tremendous emotional cost. When they died they left behind them confessions of harrowing misery and guilt—tributes to a marriage that seemed to them to be as sacred as it was tragic.

For all these Victorians, perhaps for all the eminent Victorians, morality was not an "existential" condition independent of, let alone opposed to, convention and law. On the contrary, they firmly believed morality to be rooted in social conventions and legal institutions. They might seek to reform these conventions and institutions, to make marriage and divorce more equitable and humane, but they did not presume to transcend or negate them. They did not want to remove marriage and divorce from the jurisdiction of the state (from the church perhaps, but not the state), or to make them, as Rose would like, the personal "commitment of the people involved." If individuals did find themselves, as a result of circumstance, passion, or compulsion, in some illicit or abnormal situation, this was regarded as an unfortunate aberration, to be normalized and legalized if possible, and, failing that, to be concealed (as in the case of Dickens) or domesticated (as with Eliot). It was out of respect for convention and the law that they sought to observe at least the forms of propriety—the spirit, if not the letter, of the law. And those who did deviate from the norm, for whatever reason, did so knowing they would pay the price. Like the "fastidious assassin" in Camus's *The Rebel,* who deliberately gave up his own life when he took the tyrant's life, so the Victorians, or at least the most eminent of them, insisted upon paying for their indiscretions. Agonizing over their dilemma, they tormented themselves more than they enjoyed themselves. And when society proved to be less censorious than they expected, they projected upon society their own guilt. As often as not, their ostracism was self-imposed; they were their own worst critics and judges.

If Strachey had not written *Eminent Victorians,* we would have had to invent it, for there is no better way of understanding the Victorian ethic than by contrasting it to the Bloomsbury ethic. To Strachey, Victorian morality was a form of organized hypocrisy, the eminent Victorians differing from their lesser compatriots only by being more sanctimonious. And hypocrisy was objectionable not only because it was a lie but because it assumed a moral code that was as offensive as the lie itself. In the Bloomsbury bible, G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica,* morality is represented as an entirely private, subjective affair, a matter of "states of consciousness," the highest states of consciousness, and thus the greatest goods, deriving from "personal affections and esthetic enjoyments," the "pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects." That ethic is best known in the famous dictum of E. M. Forster: "If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country." But the spirit is better conveyed in the conduct of the Bloomsbury group—in Strachey's behavior, for example, at the tribunal considering his request to be exempted from military service. Before an audience packed with his friends and relations, he slowly inflated an air cushion, seated himself upon it (he claimed to have piles), carefully adjusted a traveling rug over his knees, and finally addressed himself to the questions. Admitting that his "conscientious objection" was not to all wars but only to this one, he was asked what he would do if he saw a German soldier trying to rape his sister. Looking at each of his sisters in turn, he solemnly replied, "I should try and interpose my own body"—thus flaunting at the same time his homosexuality and his contempt for the war.

John Maynard Keynes, more discreet in his homosexuality and more thoughtful in his views, saw the implications of the ethic to which he too was committed: a totally individualistic philosophy that went beyond Moore's in repudiating any idea of social action let alone social duty, any obligation to obey "general rules" of any kind. "We were," he later said, "in the strict sense of the term, immoralists." By then (this was on

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the eve of the Second World War) he realized that the Bloomsbury ethic was based on a "disastrously mistaken" idea of human nature. But it was too late for him to change. "I remain, and always will remain, an immoralist." Today a generation committed to a still more individualistic and subjectivist ethic, invoking (illegitimately, Camus would have said) the magical name of existentialism, professes to find a higher morality in immorality.

These reflections, however, bring us into a realm where this book rarely ventures. The various modes of marriage and sexuality, of power relations and personal commitments, are deduced from the behavior of these couples, the evidence of their personal lives. But there is another kind of evidence that is pertinent, indeed essential, in understanding them. These were, after all, no ordinary Victorians; they were eminent Victorians, and eminent by virtue of their ideas. And preeminent among their ideas, infusing their novels and essays, art criticism and social criticism, were ideas about morality. It is this tension between their public and private lives, between their professions of belief and personal conduct, that Strachey exploited so effectively and disingenuously. Rose, confining herself to the domestic lives of her characters, forgoes both the tension and the understanding that come from a serious consideration of their ideas.

On one of the few occasions when ideas are broached, the results are unfortunate. Eliot, we are briefly told, abandoned the Evangelicalism of her youth in favor of a "Christianity without faith, emphasizing *caritas,* good works, and acts of loving kindness, instead of belief." This might well describe a fashionable young lady smitten by the prevalent malaise of disbelief, but it hardly does justice to Eliot's religious crisis or to her strenuous effort to find other sources of spiritual and moral certitude. Nor is the attempt to relate her new faith to her personal situation more satisfactory.

> She believed in duty and self-sacrifice. But where did duty lie? In pleasing family and friends by conforming to conventional codes of behavior, or in standing by the man she had willed into central importance in her life? And what was to be sacrificed, "that which is the deepest and gravest joy in human experience," or the greatest good life offers after that, friendship and the esteem of others?

"Standing" by her man or "pleasing" her family and friends—the Bloomsbury sect would have understood those alternatives. But was that how Eliot understood them? Was that what her "Christianity without faith," her creed of "duty and self-sacrifice," reduced itself to? Eliot, after all, was not only Lewes's lover; she was also the translator of Spinoza, Goethe, and the young Hegelians, Strauss and Feuerbach, and for a time (and with many reservations) a disciple of Comte. She was also, as Carlyle remarked, a notably "strong-minded woman," with especially strong views on the subject of morality. Long after she lost faith in Evangelicalism, she retained the deepest respect for religion and religious conformity. With or without faith, she once explained, the mere attendance at church or chapel signified a "recognition of a binding belief or spiritual law, which is to lift us into willing obedience, and save us from the slavery of unregulated passion or impulse." Whatever agony she experienced in translating that creed into practice, in justifying her "irregular" relationship with Lewes, she could not have been so dismissive of "conventional codes of behavior" as Rose makes her out to be, so banal as to make of "duty" a choice between her lover and her friends. Eliot's moral dilemma is interesting precisely because she was a serious moralist as well as a sensual and sensitive woman. It is this that makes her dilemma a genuinely moral one and not merely conventional in the most primitive sense, a question of "pleasing" her friends or family.

In different ways each of the others went through a similar spiritual and intellectual crisis. Like Eliot, Ruskin, reared as an Evangelical, rebelled against its sectarianism and

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proceeded to make a religion first of art and then of socialism. Mill, reared as a utilitarian, rebelled against its sterile rationality and sought a new morality in a "purely human religion, which sometimes calls itself the Religion of Humanity and sometimes that of Duty." Carlyle, reared as a Calvinist, rebelled against its theological dogmas and made a religion of work (*"Laborare est orare,"*) "Work is worship." Dickens is the only one who does not quite fit this pattern, his grievance being initially emotional rather than religious or philosophical—the memory of that "very small and not-over-particularly-taken-care-of boy" that haunted some of his novels. But even he translated that grievance into a moral one when he made it the basis of his critique of utilitarianism, materialism, laissez-faireism, and the do-goodism of "telescopic philanthropists" more interested in the natives of Borrioboola-Gha than in their own children. The symbols of "hearth and home" represented his alternative to those doctrines, which was why his own departure from his own hearth and home took on all the weight of a moral crisis.

If these eminent Victorians agonized so over the irregularities and improprieties of their personal lives, it was because they were so anxious about morality itself. And not because there was any actual breakdown of morality in their own time: mid-Victorian England was more moral, more proper, more law-abiding than any other society in recent history. What made morality problematic, for the future if not the present, was the breakdown of the religious consensus. When Eliot was asked how morality could subsist in the absence of religious faith, she replied that God was "inconceivable," immortality "unbelievable," and duty nonetheless "peremptory and absolute." This is the clue to the Victorian obsession with morality. Feeling guilty about the loss of their religious faith, suspecting that that loss might expose them to the temptations of immorality and the perils of nihilism, anticipating the Nietzschean dictum that if God does not exist everything is permitted, they were determined to make of morality a substitute for religion—to make of it, indeed, a form of religion. And having forfeited the sanction of religion, they were thrown back all the more on the sanctions of convention and the law. Whatever legal reforms or social changes they sought were designed to strengthen those sanctions, to give them greater moral authority and legitimacy by purging them of whatever might appear to be unjust or inhumane.

This was the common denominator, the common faith, of these Victorians. The duty to be moral, they believed (or wanted desperately to believe), was not God-given but man-made, and it was all the more "peremptory and absolute" for that. If there is any message to be found in these Victorian marriages it is not in the realm of "sexual politics," in the struggle for domination or liberation, equality or individuality, but in the realm of morality, the struggle to preserve the sanctity of marriage, as of all moral institutions, even when the form and substance were wanting.

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Who is Gabriel Fielding?

by Frances Taliaferro

In those periodic literary revisions that retrieve "forgotten" novelists, some very deserving writers have been re-established. We owe the present popularity of Barbara Pym to such a rediscovery, and we can thank presses like Dial for reissuing the works of other neglected writers who are not historical curiosities but admirable novelists in their own right. With all this revisionist activity, then, it is surprising that no attention has been paid to Gabriel Fielding.

"Gabriel Fielding" is the pseudonym of Alan Gabriel Barnsley, who was born in Northumberland, England in 1916. He studied medicine at Trinity College, Dublin, but failed to qualify there and completed his studies at St. George's Hospital in London. After serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps during World War II, he had a general practice for some years and worked part time in the prison medical service. He came to America in 1966 as an author-in-residence at Washington State University, where he remains a professor of English.

Fielding has published three volumes of poetry, a collection of stories, and seven novels. Of the latter, the most celebrated is *The Birthday King* (1963), set in Nazi Germany, which won the W. H. Smith Prize and the St. Thomas More Society gold medal. It seems to me, however, that his reputation should rest on three novels that share the same central character and point of view: if one were to defer to current notions of literary packaging, one might call them the John Blaydon Trilogy. *Brotherly Love* (1954) and *Through Streets Broad and Narrow* (1961) stand on their own as novels of adolescence and young manhood, but their depth and resonance come from their connection with the haunting, unclassifiable *In the Time of Greenbloom* (1956).[1]

Brotherly Love begins in John Blaydon's boyhood, some time in the early 1920s. John, the youngest child of the Vicarage family, worships his much older brother David, who is at Oxford; Mary, Geoffrey, and Michael, the other siblings, are engaged in constant battle with David and each other. All are "accustomed to acting as interpreters for Father in the strange language of his marriage to Mother." Father is mild, prayerful, often ineffectual, and bewildered by events, but Mother is militant, decisive, and dramatic. Both dragon and St. George, she does not merely "speak" to people but "tackles" them. She thrives on combat, on family scenes and rows, and she has the habit of "scooping up and appropriating any available emotion whether it was her own or not." In clerical as well as family matters, she rules with fierce authority, not scrupling to instruct Father in the proper conduct of his ministry.

Fielding expertly renders family politics and the sibling bicker. Here, for instance,

1 The University of Chicago Press will be republishing *In the Time of Greenbloom* in November as part of its new PhoenixFiction series.

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the brothers are ranged against their self-righteous sister Mary, a frequent antagonist:

> Mary always goaded them to fury when one of their number was engaged in a row with Mother. They surrounded her now like terriers round a cat, trembling slightly at the outrage of her scent and smoothness. They knew that she enjoyed these situations; that she had a knowledge and a sharpness which they did not possess despite their superior strength; and Mary, for her part, was equal to them. She knew that she could slash and outwit them all and then retreat with unpredictable swiftness and direction to the high bough of Mother's affection.

But *Brotherly Love* is more than a natural history of sibling rivalry. As Fielding moves from scene to scene, at intervals of several years, we see that he has concentrated the novel on concupiscence and guilt as well as on brotherly love.

David, powerfully charming and affectionate, is a man of appetite. Like his father, he becomes a clergyman. Like his grandfather, he is a womanizer, a young voluptuary whose extramarital lust is an unspeakable disability which Mother must destroy, for it threatens the Church as well as the family honor. No wonder that John's sensibility is affected. Now a medical student, he longs to lose his virginity but associates sex with disease and disgrace. His sexual initiation is one of the most ungenerous in literature, as his luetic imaginings distance him from any regard for the kind girl who is his partner.

> She got up slowly and he did not even trouble to move his legs out of her way. He wanted to; he wanted to be gay, sophisticated, tender and gallant, but he could not be bothered. Fear was already working within him and making him totally preoccupied with himself; in the forefront of his mind it was assuming dreadful shape. The eight limbs were stirring sluggishly, the great head with its expressionless eyes, the obscene pinkness, was palpitating with returning purpose and menace.

An ominous welcome for the beast with two backs.

David's death in a climbing accident is chilling and inevitable; even more chilling is Mother's fierce arrogation of David's clothes, his papers, and his memory, the proprietary ardor of her prayer "that whatsoever defilements he may have contracted in the midst of this miserable and naughty World, through the lusts of the flesh or the wiles of Satan, [be] purged and done away with." *Brotherly Love* ends with an extraordinary scene in which John and his mother keep vigil beside David's coffin, in the dark church that "held death most intimately; within it, mortality awaited [John] personalized and unshriven." John's final vision of David, padding along the cold nave like a naked child searching through an empty room in an empty house, summons a long *frisson* of fear and pity but offers no catharsis.

The strangeness that distinguishes the conclusion of *Brotherly Love* is a constant presence in *In the Time of Greenbloom.* It is a strangeness out of proportion to the familiar elements of the "novel of growing up": love, the loss of innocence, and the isolation of the adolescent hero; the hypocrisy of the adult world and the cruelty of adolescent life; the appearance of an exotic character who presides over the hero's self-discovery. These elements appear in *Greenbloom,* but merely to itemize them is to get the novel all wrong. To call it "magical" is only partly useful, if that word implies a shining and hopeful enchantment: *Greenbloom* is a very dark novel with despair at its heart and no transfiguring resolution. It is a beautiful and painful book.

John Blaydon, twelve when the novel opens, reluctantly attends a tennis party where the hostess has paired him with a girl of his age, Victoria Blount. Their tennis is foolish and inexpert but their friendship is immediate. They are "alike, dreadfully, excitingly alike," in their physical appearance and in their vivid sympathy. Talking nineteen to the dozen, they slip away from the tennis party as if they were entering another world:

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first the rose garden, a place of scent and secrecy, and then another secret place, a still, deep little lake ringed with forest under the "high blue medallion of the sky." Here they take off their clothes to swim, and here bold Victoria almost drowns among the water lilies.

> All that [John] felt for her, all of pity, guilt and horror, all of the sudden evil risen like a spectre from the lake, became fixed and resident in the swans as they floated in their white indifference a few feet away watching her easily, contentedly, and with no curiosity.

John rescues Victoria, tows her back to land, gives her artificial respiration and watches in triumph as she vomits party food and lake water and returns to life. Now the passage through the rose garden and the lake has sealed their intimacy on the first day of their new creation. They are naked but not ashamed; John "knows" Victoria in a sense deeper than the Biblical, but they remain innocent. Only the arrival of their hostess, the tattling of John's sister, and his mother's inquisition introduce thoughts of guilt and "nasty impurity"—all because Victoria was naked and John looked at her. But John cries to his mother, "I didn't *look,* I *saw*!" and thinks to himself, "I saw her, all of her that was to be seen, and that no one else will ever be able to see again no matter how long they may look or live."

The central event of *Greenbloom*—indeed, of John's life—takes place not long after, when John is twelve and a half and Victoria thirteen. Victoria and her mother are spending the holidays in Yorkshire; John is with them for a few days. The children have planned an expedition to some caves on the moors. Their list of supplies is a Boy Scout classic: candles, matches, a penknife, first aid supplies, and—"I bet you forgot one thing," says Victoria. "The revolver! You know, I told you, in case one of us gets pinned under a fallen rock and the other one has to put him out of his agony." Hardly missing a beat, Victoria changes the tone of the conversation from *Tom Sawyer* to *Romeo and Juliet,* and elicits from John a meditation on how he might feel if she were to die: "there'd be just nothing for ever and ever." The pain of this dreadful subject is punctuated by a new discomfort. Victoria is developmentally miles ahead of John, and she teases him with references to a rival, an adult hiker with whom she flirted that morning.

The caves, when at last they arrive, are strange, beautiful, and frightening: "the whisper of water through darkness and against limestone . . . the sense of an ancient wind moving in hidden fastnesses." Bravely the children go through with their plan to have tea, but this uneasy meal is interrupted by the appearance of Victoria's hiker. Cocky and vulgar, he cheapens their intimacy with his insinuations that they have come to the cave to make love. It is a relief to return to the fresh air, even to accept a lift home in his car. At the last minute, John stays at the house and Victoria goes on with the hiker to post an important letter for her mother. John never again sees her alive; she is found murdered in the cave where the children had their last tea.

All of *In the Time of Greenbloom* anticipates, recollects, and radiates from this terrible and masterly chapter. Fielding, a writer of taste, avoids a graphic depiction of the decisive event, but such a representation is in any case unnecessary: the shadow of death and the undercurrent of ugly sexuality combine most powerfully to suggest the terms of Victoria's murder. The reader's mind plays on it with awful interest, as one might hear the news of any violent death and irresistibly be drawn to imagining the lurid circumstances. Nothing intrinsically horrible is actually represented, but it is Fielding's art to make the reader experience the murder with a loathsome and almost unbearable certainty.

The "Greenbloom" of the title, which ought to refer to this period of John's youth, provides instead the unkindest irony: his adolescence is not a flowering but an emptiness born of irrevocable experience. Repeatedly, "Nothing seems real, except *that*"—the event that John cannot bring himself to

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name. Adolescent despair can be as powerful as the adult variety, even if the adolescent must endure it in situations that adults find trivial. John's despair is persistently sidestepped by his family, who find his newspaper publicity inconvenient and his school failures despicable. The reader has the advantage of having seen Fielding's epigraph, from Jeremiah: "Aspexi terram et ecce vacua erat, et nihil; et coelos, et non erat lux in eis." But almost no character in the novel can appreciate the depth of John's nullity.

It is the actual Greenbloom who takes John seriously at last. Horab Greenbloom is an Oxford undergraduate when John meets him: immensely rich and exotic, cultivated, impatient, a natural fascinator. Greenbloom has "a capacity for such intense self-interest that lesser people and their smaller desires simply ceased to exist when he chose to exercise his power to the full." In his presence, John feels for the first time since Victoria's death the possibility of another reality—"a new country, the Greenbloom country." Some of Greenbloom's more colorful deeds have the stylish eccentricity of their counterparts in Evelyn Waugh, as when Greenbloom sets out for France in his DeHavilland Moth, takes a wrong turn, and lands in Ireland. (He maintains the fiction that he has landed at Chantilly, speaking French all the while to a native of County Kildare who replies in a whisky-sodden brogue that Greenbloom identifies as "the hideous adenoidal drawl of the Pays Basque.")

But Greenbloom is not just another decorative eccentric. No one else can acknowledge John's suicidal longings, address his pervasive guilt, or even come close to understanding his feeling that "I want to be forgiven for something I never did as well as for all the things I did do . . . . Can you tell me why I feel that I ought to be forgiven for something I never did?" *In the Time of Greenbloom* is a novel that resists interpretation, asking to *be* rather than to be "understood," but Greenbloom himself provides a philosophical gathering place for certain views.

John describes himself as "tired of meanings"; Greenbloom answers that "There *are* no meanings. No meanings that we can apprehend. Ludwig Wittgenstein was right when he said that." John's exasperated response—"Oh, *Wittgenstein*!"—precedes his most fervent speech: "Nothing else irremediable, nothing that makes sense has ever happened to me since [the murder] and never can." Greenbloom then observes that "Very early in life you have suffered by attachment, by a supreme attachment, that *de*tachment which it is the object of all developed men to achieve." It seems natural for him to evoke his friend Sartre at this moment, and a reader who wanted to ride the existential hobbyhorse could do so, finding in John's isolation and exile the human condition rather than the adolescent predicament. But readers who are not philosophically inclined may simply prefer the old-fashioned hope that John's suffering will teach him to live.

Through Streets Broad and Narrow, the third in the "trilogy," is a more conventional novel than *Brotherly Love* or *Greenbloom.* The form and venue are both familiar: it is a portrait of the artist as a medical student in Dublin. This novel is dominated by John's exhausting, inconclusive love for Dymphna Uprichard, an Irish beauty who reminds him of Victoria. John's determination to win her leads him to many of the excesses of his Dublin life. He swaggers through much experimentation with different styles and identities, and ventures disastrously into authorship with a brutal satire that savages the faculty on whose support he depends for his medical certification. John's love for Dymphna is the emblem of his instinct for self-sabotage: he will not consummate it until she admits she loves him, which she pleasantly, selfishly does not do. The result is "the dreadful repetitive inconclusive pattern of their love-making." John's eventual disenchantment with Dymphna does not happen until she is married and he visits her in the nursing home where she is recovering from a "surgical miscarriage." In a quick and astonishing vision, he sees the morbid-

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ity of his long, weary passion and thinks that he may be "cured" of Victoria as well as Dymphna.

Through Streets Broad and Narrow offers more social portraiture than either of its predecessors. John is not over-fond of the Dublin Irish and his reservations account for many bitter little sketches and larger characterizations. Most entertaining is the portrait of the consummate snob, Auberon Vallance. Impeccably connected, podgy, seal-like, and pomaded, he plays the viola da gamba and powders the top of his young bald head. He never drinks "anything socially unproclaimed" and "never, save where John was concerned, consented to know anyone intimately who was not what he termed *crème de la crème.*" (Auberon is in fact "as miserably in love with [John] as a débutante with a second footman.") A visit to Bishopscourt, Auberon's family estate, provides a bit of the *ancien régime* for John's collection of worldly experiences.

Greenbloom also appears in *Through Streets Broad and Narrow*. By this time we have reached the late 1930s; wartime Dublin is neutral but Greenbloom is a Jew and he is attempting to save his brother Eli from a Nazi concentration camp. Undergraduate folly and extravagance seem out of place; the gathering mood is somber and elegiac. One last self-sabotaging episode lands John in jail, but as the novel ends it is clear that he has broken free of Dublin and the ghosts of his old life—will now perhaps be his own man for the first time.

The John Blaydon novels are very much the best of Gabriel Fielding's work. Perhaps what distinguishes them is autobiographical material, whose presence the reader infers partly from the fragments of Fielding's biography that appear on the jackets of his books, but largely from an urgent impression of emotional authenticity. It seems both pointless and tasteless to wonder whether these novels are based on "actual experience." If there is autobiography in them, there is certainly no taint of confession—the self-indulgent spilling of guts, the assumption that unedited sensation will beguile the reader as it does the subject. Here experience is modulated by detachment. The author's pity is curiously absent from even the most pitiable moments, nor does he show glee or self-satisfaction or enchantment with the sound of his own voice, though he is not a cold or impersonal writer. Knowing of his career in medicine, one is tempted to imagine the influence on Fielding of long observation and training in the clinic.

The power of these novels comes, however, not from clinical accuracy but from a ceremonial willingness to look on the beauty and terror in life. *Through Streets Broad and Narrow* is the least of the three because it is the most naturalistic. *Brotherly Love* and *Greenbloom* have "some strangeness in the proportion," combining comedy with despair, alienation with the most densely plaited engagement, all acknowledged in prose of unfailing measure and appropriate beauty. Fielding is a Roman Catholic, but the John Blaydon novels suggest that he may have been converted from Anglicanism. I do not think it is frivolous to infer the stylistic influence of the King James Bible and the Anglican liturgy, or to think that a heritage of custom and ceremony might have encouraged Fielding's wise perspective. He is an entirely civilized writer.

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Zola: the father's tale

by Frederick Brown

The thought that some mental catastrophe would occur overnight and estrange him from his enterprise haunted Emile Zola throughout his life. As prolific as he was, he often began the day feeling a novice whom the ten or fifteen published volumes of the *Rougon-Macquart* offered no assurance that he could write another. Until language flowed again, those volumes were witnesses not to the genius he had at his command but to a power as wanton and ironical as the hereditary flaw that sabotages the *Moi* his heroes strive vainly to preserve. Few people knew about this Zola, who, despite his aversion to religious superstition, inhabited a world fraught with omens and signs, with hostile spirits the fear of which drove him to seek comfort in magical ceremonies. And those who did know were incredulous. "Life is skillfully arranged so as to make no one happy," noted Edmond de Goncourt in December 1880. "Here [in Zola] is a man who fills the world with his name, whose books sell by the hundred thousand, who has perhaps been more bruited in his lifetime than any other author. Well, as a result of this sickly disposition, of the hypochondriacal cast of his mind, he is blacker and more forlorn than the most disinherited of dry fruit."

Describing Zola as "disinherited" came very near the heart of the matter, though Goncourt may not have realized how or to what extent success, for the man whose success he envied, was bound up with a childhood tragedy that left him always half inclined to deny himself the fruits of it. What Zola gained later in life never quite equalled what he lost early. Relentlessly building and collecting, he saw in his edifice the potential ruin and in all he amassed illusory bulk. Had it been otherwise, had acts of self-aggrandizement not conjured a shadow that held him hostage to the past, he would not have been his father's equivocally pious son.

In February 1847, François Zola, a civil engineer who left his native Italy soon after the 1820 uprisings against Austria, had good reason to feel jubilant, for on the fourth day of that month work finally began on a project he fully expected would make him rich. At fifty-one, he was director of a joint-stock company authorized by the French government to build a dam for collecting water in the Infernets gorge east of Aix-en-Provence and channeling it through the perennially drought-stricken countryside below. Since 1838, when Aix's municipal council first signed an agreement with him, there had been many turns at which a less obstinate man might have despaired of ever seeing the venture brought to a material conclusion. His proposal had spent seasons in the fastness of the French bureaucracy and would have perished there had not the Council of State saved it from the Ministry of the Interior. A squire over whose property the canal was to run had frustrated Monsieur Zola with legal maneuvers that wheeled round and round the issue of *com-*

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modo et incommodo. Investors had grown impatient, ready to pull up stakes as the economy struggled through the second decade of Louis Philippe's reign before entering a full-scale depression in 1845. But that was in the past now, and the problems yet to be solved did not intimidate Zola. Blasting open the mountain announced a new era for him. Once water started to course into the fountains of Aix-en-Provence three or four years hence, he could satisfy the creditors who had maintained him during this long ordeal.

François Zola never repaid his debts. On the mountain where in February bitter winds knife down from the Massif Central, he caught a cold that became progressively worse as his project required that he keep shuttling without respite between Aix, the dam site, and the office of contractors in Marseille. He was in Marseille, at a small establishment called the Hôtel de la Méditerranée, when, on March 27, 1847, it all ended for him. The doctor summoned by his wife attributed death to pleurisy.

Although funeral arrangements were made at short notice, François Zola was buried with all the pomp and ceremony Aix could improvise for a citizen on whom had devolved something of the magical power that Provençaux formerly invested in rain-making saints. At the Place de la Rotonde, outside the city wall, a delegation of clergy met the wagon draped in black cloth that brought his corpse up from Marseille, thirty miles south. Surrounded by the mayor, the sub-prefect, an eminent Paris lawyer named Alexandre Labot, and the district engineer, each holding one corner of the pall, François Zola was borne to the cathedral of Saint-Sauveur and given absolution before Monsignor Rey, bishop of Saint-Denis. Afterward, the funeral cortege, at whose head stood Zola's young widow and his seven-year-old son, Emile, proceeded through crowds that had gathered in the narrow streets of the old quarter to pay homage. Labot eulogized him as an heroic figure who united the virtue of antiquity and the scientific animus of modern times. "He fell on arriving at the goal. Just as he was about to crown his work, he succumbed in the prime of life, without having gathered the fruit of his long and painful labors . . . . To the literary renown of the city of Aix and to its judicial glory, Zola was intent on adding the glitter of industrial prosperity. The canal that must bear his name will beget numerous factories here. How often did he speak with satisfaction and love of the new wealth his canal would give your city. He will never witness this brilliant future. There he lies today in his coffin. But he will survive in the memory of the inhabitants of this city." One week later, the newspaper, *La Provence,* which outdid *Le Mémorial d'Aix* in necrological embellishments and paired Zola with Moses, opened a subscription fund to raise money for a tombstone that would express the public's gratitude until such time as an operative canal entitled him to some "more splendid monument."

Given the civic pride of Aix's official mourners, Labot did not labor the point that a life so congenial to the age had begun and ended in cities for which nineteenth-century Europe could find no great or useful purpose. François Zola was born Francesco Zolla on August 7, 1795, in Venice. The Zolla family had provided the Venetian Republic with a succession of military officers and civil servants. Francesco's grandfather, Antonio, who hailed from Brescia, spent years as an infantry captain in the Levantine provinces. His father, Carlo, after serving in the corps of engineers, was appointed Inspector General of public buildings in Venice. His older brother, Marco, followed suit. The political upheavals that began with Napoleon's invasion of Venetia in 1797 did not interrupt the family tradition, though they were eventually to drive Francesco from the family fold. In 1810, he entered the military academy at Pavia. Two years later—Napoleon having meanwhile whittled out of Lombardy-Venetia a puppet state called the Kingdom of Italy and made his stepson, Eugène de Beauharnais, viceroy—Francesco was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Imperial Army. Then came

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Waterloo. When the Allied Powers met at the Congress of Vienna to redesign Europe, Metternich claimed Venice for Austria, so that Francesco found himself serving the Hapsburgs in an Italian regiment. During this period of explosive calm, he petitioned the military governor of the Venetian provinces for leave to study at the University of Padua. His request was granted. "About one year ago, I obtained, through your benevolence, permission to complete my mathematical studies at the university," he wrote by way of dedicating to Baron de Lattermann a dissertation on geodetics published in 1818 under the title *Trattato di Livellazione Topografica.* "As soon as I had completed them, I undertook, without neglecting my military duties, to examine the most delicate geodetic operations of the engineer. From this examination has come a little book that combines, I believe, well-established principles and several new ideas on the theory and practice of land surveying." Equipped with a doctorate in mathematics which would be his bridge back to civilian life, Lieutenant Zolla spent only two more years soldiering. In 1820, when the bastinado was introduced as punishment for military indiscipline, he resigned from the 26th regiment of Austrian infantry. In 1821 he departed Italy, and never lived there again.

Unlike thousands of intellectuals hounded into exile after the uprisings of 1820, Francesco left of his own free will. Did he sympathize with fellow officers who went underground, or have clandestine associations? It would be remarkable if Metternich's attempt to make Italy a mere "geographical expression" by incriminating all signs of cultural *amour-propre* never stirred in Francesco the impulse to join some such secret society as the Adelfi. He was young, and from Vienna there descended on Lombardy-Venetia a flock of bewigged officials who brought the message that youth was suspect. He had ambitions, and under the rigid bureaucracy they staffed forward movement became anathema. To be sure, Hapsburg rule saved Venetia from economic ruin, but with secret police agents everywhere, and censorship exercised even on the works of Dante, a Venetian could hardly forget that he was a prisoner in his own land. As Giusti put it, Italians "ate Austria in their bread."

While political fugitives scattered to England, Switzerland, Holland, Spain, Corsica, and Greece, Francesco Zolla went where opportunity beckoned, to Austria itself, spurning the advice of his cautious brother, Marco, who viewed the prospect of rewards to be won in the outside world as the jack-o'-lantern that leads fools astray. By 1824, he had become associated with a project for which his expertise in geodetics made him particularly qualified—the construction of a rail line between Linz on the Danube and Budweis on the Moldau. This route paralleled the *goldener Steig* or "golden road," whose local importance was bound up with the fact that along it mule trains carried salt from mines high in the Salzkammergut range to a state-controlled market in Bohemia. Since the fourteenth century, plans for more expeditious transportation, of which there had been many, always revolved around the idea of digging a canal through the hilly, forested terrain that separated the two great rivers. Then, in 1813, a book written by an Austrian engineer named Franz-Josef von Gerstner suggested the railway as a plausible alternative to the artificial watercourse. No one took heed during those years of conflict and his book gathered dust until, eight years later, an Austrian minister prevailed on von Gerstner's son, himself an engineer, to investigate the theory. After visiting Great Britain, which was unique in having towns linked by iron track, Franz Anton von Gerstner felt confident that English technology could be applied at Linz-Budweis. He thus founded the *Erste Österreichische Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft,* with Francesco Zolla among his original recruits.

Had he left well enough alone, von Gerstner would have built a railroad, despite proprietary litigation of the kind that almost scuttled Zola's project in Aix-en-Provence. But during the winter of 1826-27, he visited England once again, taking Zolla with him, and came home a convert to the steam-

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driven locomotive, which he apparently saw at work on the Stockton-Darlington line. This vision of the future estranged him from the company directors, who had only just awoken to the novelties of his first scheme when he insisted they modernize it at all costs. Diplomacy was not von Gerstner's strong suit, as one might expect with a man professionally obsessed by the swiftest route between two points. Authoritarian in outlook, he made enemies even of the engineers he hired, and found himself quite alone during the bitter fight that resulted in his dismissal.

Long before von Gerstner came to grief, Zolla left the *Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft* to organize a company of his own. Having figured out how the Linz-Budweis line could be run uphill as far as the salt mines near Gmunden, he brought to bear on rich acquaintances that power of persuasion which would almost always enable him to fund the ventures his active mind conceived. By June 1829, when Franz I granted him an imperial charter, one article of which required him to lay five miles of track within two years or forfeit his licence, preparatory work was already done. He had surveyed the terrain, plotted a course, purchased land, ordered rails, and foreseen every contretemps save the unimaginable possibility that Austria might rescind its state monopoly on the sale of salt to Bohemia. This, however, is what the Austrian government did several months after construction had begun in earnest. Nothing could have hurt him more. Capital fled from an enterprise whose future suddenly seemed murky, and Zolla, to keep it afloat, was obliged to go public. Here again the government smiled disaster upon him, for it authorized incorporation, but not until time had caught him short. The "Zola Railroad Company" (Zola with only one "l") was as good as dead at birth. Once it became clear that an effort to postpone the due date specified in his agreement would fail, Zola resigned. Directors of the *Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft,* who may have devised this outcome, lost no time claiming the vacant concession. In 1832 they began work on the Gmunden line where Zola had left off, with Zola's plans to guide them. By then, he himself had quit Austria and served a year in the French Foreign Legion.

There had presumably been no question for him of going home, if he still considered Venice home. What Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote some years later during a European tour taken with his family, that "it was really like passing from death into life, to find ourselves in busy, cheerful, effervescing France, after living for so long between asleep and awake in sluggish Italy," pictures the scene much as Zola must have beheld it in 1831. Life against death, progress versus retrogression. When France overthrew the Bourbon king in 1830 to set its course with a constitutional monarch who allowed bourgeois energies free play, a chill ran down Europe's spine from Berlin to Vienna to Rome and stiffened the powers-that-were against opinion inimical to established authority. Such opinion was seen to include not only the liberties Pope Gregory XVI denounced in his encyclical, *Mirari Vos* (above all, freedom of conscience), but the economic principles of List, Ricardo, and Say, which had won support among businessmen throughout those countries sheltering from change in their Holy Alliance. Anyone who would argue the need for better roads, more canals, free ports, steam navigation, insurance companies, modern banks, or uniform coinage exposed himself to a charge of subversion. And where liberal minds convened, as in Romagnosi's journal *Annali Universali di Statistica,* Austrian censors kept close watch.

Feeling out of joint with a world inhospitable to the creed that nurtured in him his adventurous and lofty sense of what men should be about, Zola made for Paris, along with the multitude of Poles, Italians, Germans, and Belgians who had become *personae non gratae* at home after the revolutions of 1830. A portrait from this period shows us a slight figure nothing like the portly bourgeois Emile Zola knew. He was far from handsome, yet his gaze, which holds us at a genial, faintly ironic distance,

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suggests that he might have thought himself so, or given it little thought. The mustache he grew in middle age had not yet disguised the purposeful set of his mouth.

France welcomed refugees who would help man her North African outposts, eager as she was to extend herself further beyond Europe in the quest for markets, raw materials, and glory, but with a male population numerically depleted by the Napoleonic campaigns. A survey of employment opportunities told Zola that military skill afforded the penniless immigrant more immediate credit than experience as an engineer, and so he joined the Foreign Legion, which was then several months old. Supporting his dossier with plans he had drawn up—heaven knows when—for an ingenious system of fortifications to be deployed around Paris did not earn him the captaincy he felt was his due, though it elicited praise from one war office general. A lieutenant eleven years earlier, he became a lieutenant once again, in Algiers, under the name of François Zola.

Its first volunteers contracted to serve at least three years in the Foreign Legion. Zola resigned after one as the result of a strange imbroglio that would perhaps be forgotten today (or at all events would concern us only for what it says about his character) had not a muckraker intent on compromising Emile Zola brought it to light sixty-seven years later, in 1898, during the Dreyfus Affair. According to the Duke de Rovigo, general in command of the French occupation force, whose report dates to September 1832, François Zola mysteriously vanished from his regiment one day. Garments recognized as belonging to him were found on the beach near Algiers, which prompted speculation that he had either drowned himself for love of his mistress, one Madame Fischer, who had just left Algeria with her husband, or else joined them in a *ménage à trois*. It was decided to seize and search the vessel on which the Fischers were sailing after close scrutiny of regimental accounts under Zola's management revealed a deficit. "Zola was not on board," wrote Rovigo, "but [among the Fischers' effects] were 4,000 francs. At first they claimed that the sum rightfully belonged to them, then confessed that a portion of it, 1500 francs, had been deposited by Zola. They were taken ashore and led to prison." Soon thereafter, Zola, who apparently fled as soon as it dawned on him that he had played the stooge in an embezzlement scheme, made it known from his hiding place that he would cover the loss provided there be no prosecution. Needing money more than it needed another deserter, the Legion's administrative council agreed to this bargain. So it came about that on October 30, 1832, François Zola was given an honorable discharge and early in the following year embarked for Marseille, still determined at age thirty-seven to find purchase in his country of adoption.

Marseille offered easy purchase. The observation of an eighteenth-century merchant that "although Marseille be situated in France, one may regard it as little Turkey, little Italy, little Barbary, and an epitome of all the best and worst in those lands" was no less true in 1833 than in 1725. Since Napoleon's fall, many more ingredients had been added to the stew of nations mixing there. When its status as a free port was restored, the Greek colony grew larger. From across the Italian border there arrived fugitive Carbonari, including the most vociferous of all, Giuseppe Mazzini, who soon outspoke his welcome. Legionnaires bound for Algeria whiled away their last hours on European soil at dockside *lupanari*. All the winds of war, trade, and social discontent that promoted movement in the Mediterranean basin brought human waves to Marseille, and now mechanical power brought them faster. Its population increased by half during Louis Philippe's regime as the steamship came of age, together with the railroad.

Marseille was for the civil engineer what Byzantium must have been for the voluptuary. Wherever he chanced to look, opportunities abounded. The dark streets inspired Zola, three months after he arrived, to float a joint-stock company for manufacturing gas of the kind used since 1832 in the illumination of Paris. The woefully insufficient

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water supply needed urgent attention and in due course Zola would devise a plan for tapping the Huveaune River. Lack of room within the city created a real-estate boom outside it, where Zola acquired parcels of land that proved more remunerative than his paper gasworks. Above all there was the question of a new harbor, to which he gave the better part of his life from about 1835—when records indicate he employed three draftsmen and two apprentices at his office on the Cannebière—until 1839.

By then, the old harbor, or Vieux-Port, which had choked on traffic even before French warships began mooring there for the Algerian expedition, was generally recognized as being incommensurate with the role that Marseille could hope to play in Mediterranean affairs of the nineteenth century. "It is astonishing," wrote Zola, "that so rich and prosperous a city does not yet possess a suitable establishment which, in facilitating commercial operations, warehousing merchandise, expediting its passage through customs and shipment, would—by its structure, by the grandiose idea that will have presided over its execution, by the real advantages it will offer commerce—be an eternal monument to the power of our resources and our energy." His orotund prospectus accompanied a blueprint he sent to the Marseille city council after bureaucratic machinery for building a new dock had finally been set in motion. Though there were those who found it rather too grandiose, Zola's strategy offered such a cogent solution to the navigational problems posed by reefs and contrary winds that on March 5, 1835, the municipal council moved to adopt it.

Presently we find him in Paris where the ultimate task of obtaining government sanction would keep him for months at a stretch. Toward the end of May the *Moniteur Universel* noted under its court rubric that "M. Zola, engineer-architect-topographer," had had an audience with the king's son, the Prince de Joinville, who perused "the plans of his masterful work, recently adopted by Marseille, for the creation of a harbor to be called the Joinville Docks." Other such auspicious signs flashed from above and when, on September 26, a naval commission seconded the endorsement of the city council, success was finally at hand. Not for nothing—or so it must have seemed—had Zola exhorted the government "to accord us that tutelary protection which alone induces general confidence, . . . to reward the labors of genius by granting it exclusive ownership of its inventions, . . . to encourage capitalists and inventors with large concessions in order that they may direct their common energies toward the honorable goal of raising industrial France to the highest degree of perfection . . . ." This agenda, with a vocabulary that strongly suggests he had read Claude Henri de Saint-Simon on the technocratic utopia, defined his affinities to several prominent gentlemen who befriended him in Paris, among them Alexandre Labot.

Success, like a cruel flirt leading on her suitor for the pleasure of finally saying no, eluded Zola once again. In the long run, neither the boldness of his ideas, nor the intercession of his friends, nor even the putative sponsorship of the Prince de Joinville could thwart the campaign waged by a rival engineer named Eugène Flachat. Zola was prepared to show that Flachat's design for the Marseille waterfront had been lifted in almost every particular from technical books about the new port at London (where Flachat had lived) but reason alone did not work against an old-boy network of French engineers whose influence held sway through the public and private sectors. Such was the situation as described in a letter Marco Zolla wrote on February 26, 1837, to acknowledge receipt of documents that bore on Flachat's intrigues:

> Councillor Francesconi stopped here . . . en route to Vienna after his honorable mission to England and France . . . . He told me he had met you several times and acquainted you with his fear that, despite the justice of your cause, you may be undone by national jealousy, . . . that a new project may be adopted which would be yours in substance but not in

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> name . . . . Nothing must surprise you in this blind world, given the fact that you have until now been the unrivalled victim of all-powerful blindness. Your ideas, which carried the day over those of 13 French engineers [in the competition for Marseille's port], are known to the entire civilized world.

Marco advised that he withdraw from the fray, live in Marseille, and quietly prosper there while his misguided foes learned the error of their ways. Once again, brother ignored brother's advice. What might have made some impression on a less pugnacious man glanced off this egoist, of whom we can safely say that he would never have left Venice if he hadn't been inclined to go for broke where great dreams were at stake. Two years later, he had indeed gone broke gambling his last sou on a favorable decision. "I have spent three years in Paris without income and have, besides, contracted 20,000 francs worth of debts using every means to bring off this important enterprise," he told his sister, who had dunned him for money. "I hope that during this session [early 1839] the ministry will place before parliament the law relating to my project; I shall then be able to breathe a little, but there will be no definitive result for another 8 or 10 months."

All the same, there lurked an *homme moyen sensuel* in François Zola, or enough of one to persuade him that he should finally organize his life around a wife and a hearth. When everything else was hanging in the balance, he married a young woman named Emilie Aubert, whose family had come to Paris some years earlier—even before 1819, the year she was born—from the town of Dourdan, near Chartres. "He first noticed her as she was coming out of church, and her beauty and charm did the rest; he did not marry her for the sake of a portion, since she had none," wrote Emile Zola. In a metropolis where most people went hungry every day, the Auberts coped, but with no wide margin between themselves and indigence. Emilie's mother worked as a seamstress, her father as a house painter and glazier. Of her four brothers, none ever escaped this precarious existence, and François would find himself called upon at times to help them out. That he could do so compensated for the fact that he was twenty-four years older than Emilie. Even if she had seen her prince arriving in some other guise, which we know nothing about, a dowerless girl of twenty chosen by a man who numbered among his well-wishers the once and future prime minister, Adolphe Thiers, was bound to regard herself as greatly fortunate.

They were married in a civil ceremony on March 16, 1839, and again, eleven months later, at the church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois. It appears that the couple lived near the Louvre with Emilie's brother, Adolphe Aubert, until they found more suitable quarters near the Bourse, at 10*bis* rue Saint-Joseph, in a handsome new building flanked by dilapidated tenements and mansions formerly belonging to the aristocracy. Quiet must have reigned on the rue Saint-Joseph when a church from which the street got its name used one corner of it as burial ground, but the graveyard had long since become a marketplace that overflowed with peddlers and behind it ran another narrow passage, the rue du Croissant, where printing presses, newspaper offices, and *camelots* hawking the daily editions raised a constant din. Here Emilie was only several blocks away from her parents on the rue de Cléry, which surely dictated the Zolas' choice of neighborhood, for they knew beforehand that in the large flat they had rented five floors above street level she would soon want the comfort of a mother as well as the expertise of a midwife. At 11:00 P.M. on April 2, 1840, Emilie gave birth to a boy, who was christened Emile Edouard Charles Antoine.

Emile Zola entered this world trailing names that evoked a line of Venetian ancestors, yet François's pious resolve to commemorate the dead family did not influence him to keep the living one abreast of events in his life. Since January 1839 he had not once corresponded with his brother and sister, and they feared the worst until a letter

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from him arrived in August 1840. "At last I've read you and I thank the Almighty for such a favor," answered his sister. "Your long silence had plunged us into anguish and we began wondering if you were still alive. Whatever your occupations may have been, you would have comforted your relatives by giving them fifteen minutes of your time . . . . You have written and we are happy. I rejoice in your marriage and your paternity. I should like with all my heart to meet your new wife, but you forgot to tell me her name." Where Marco Zolla cherished a dream that the whole family would someday knit together again, François's strongest impulse was to let the past unravel behind him as he advanced in life weaving a new fabric for himself out of the material offered by France and science and Emilie Aubert. Perhaps his incommunicativeness during this momentous period gratified the same need to vanish, or feign death, that overcame him on the beach at Algiers, just as the omission of his wife's name may have answered some unconscious wish to protect his own identity. The self-made man in whom François manifested such pride made the expanse between Paris and Venice *terra incognita*. So complete was this void (which, like "the self-made man," became a theme with infinite variations in his son's life and work) that Emile Zola would reach late middle age before meeting his paternal kin. Half French and half Italian, he grew up deprived of Italian roots and of French citizenship.

Marco, who died in 1840, urged François one last time to seek the easy commissions available in Marseille, declaring that "you must curb your fantasy and devote yourself to your domestic duties and the peaceful exercise of your profession," but what François hoped to obtain from the power-brokers whose favor he had curried did not allow him just yet to relinquish his seat beside them, least of all in 1840, when Thiers was appointed prime minister. Ideas for one venture or another tumbled down the rue Saint-Joseph and optimistically spread out across Paris. The government having been roused by war fever over the "Eastern Question" to do something about the capital's fortification, François sent a new draft of his old plan to Louis Philippe. It got no farther than it had nine years earlier and he consoled himself with the invention of a mechanical shovel which was eventually used in digging moats near Clignancourt. The year 1840 also marked the outbreak of Abd-el-Kader's *Jehad* or holy war. On October 10, 1840, during the bloody battles being waged throughout the Mitidja region, François wrote the President of the Council of Ministers proposing that France charter in Algeria a kind of East India Company to be capitalized at a hundred million francs and granted a ninety-nine-year concession over territory wrested from the Arabs. Had it found support, this enterprise, which argued his Saint-Simonian vision of a state run as a private corporation by businessmen and engineers, would have given the new aediles sovereign responsibility for protecting European settlers, directing their operations, building their villages, and furnishing them provisions.

However important in itself, such activity served to make François think about something other than the Aix-en-Provence canal, on which his greatest hopes of success had rested since 1838, when an agreement with Aix was first drawn up. He kept beating the devil's tattoo as he waited for the government to issue that decree of *utilité publique* without which his contract remained ineffective, and the government showed no disposition whatever to rush ahead. "It really seems that a curse hangs over this project: we lost eight months in the bureau of the Prefecture and now ten weeks more [waiting upon the official appointed to draft a report for the Ministry of Public Works]," he lamented in March 1840 to the mayor of Aix, Antoine Aude, at whose behest subsidies for the canal had been voted. Round and round it shuffled, with captious functionaries partnering it in an aimless two-step, until the durable Zola grew desperate. By 1842, a decision sufficiently favorable to

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buoy them emerged from the Ministry of the Interior, whereupon Zola fell gravely ill. His presence was now required in Aix more than in Paris, but three months passed before he could consider moving south. "After a long illness, I am now better, and set to leave for Aix next Monday, having already purchased my seat," he informed Aude on March 1, 1843. "I beg you delay until then presenting to the municipal council those documents you received from the prefect, which bear on modifications in our agreement." Presumably the arrangement was that his wife and child would follow as soon as quarters had been found for them.

Emile Zola's earliest memory of a house took him back to 6, impasse Silvacanne, where his parents settled after they familiarized themselves with Aix. Situated almost in the shadow of Saint-Sauveur cathedral, but just outside the ruins of a city wall, their house abutted town and country. Overlooking its own large garden with windows that could be shuttered to give it the characteristically blank look of Provençal *bastides,* it had room far beyond the Zolas' immediate needs. It also had historical importance, for this square, whitewashed villa was where Adolphe Thiers had lived during his law-school days—a connection not lost on the town council, who must have seen François Zola as someone capable of making them more visible in the eyes of Parisian officialdom.

At first Aix seemed unbearable, and in a letter she wrote to Madame Aubert toward the end of June 1845, Emilie, a homesick Parisienne lost beneath a Provençal sky, described her tribulations. Foremost among them was the precarious health of Emile, over whom she had anxiously doted ever since he fell into a deathlike swoon at age two from what physicians diagnosed as "brain fever." That spring some mysterious illness kept him bedridden for weeks, but no sooner did he recover than François in turn began to ail. With everyone wilting around her, sickness colored her view of the world outside. The sun shed jaundice over Aix's antique charms. It bleached the hills and darkened her skin. It killed the crops and reduced her family to a monotonous diet of omelettes and lamb. "As you see, since our separation from you we have not known happiness," she told her mother. "I wish we could be reunited; if we were, I assure you that I believe it would improve our well-being here, since boredom has taken firm hold of me." All she had for diversion was a view of mountains, and she felt surrounded by them "as by the walls of a prison." In two years she never once took a stroll, which suggests that the "Cours," the wide main avenue of Aix where every Sunday Aixois paraded under the acacias in their finery—common people on the north side and aristocrats on the south—was to be eschewed. François could hardly walk through town without peasants badgering him for information as to when they might expect water. Emilie found it altogether "a land of savages."

Such hardships were endured with the idea constantly in mind that Zola, the lifelong *arriviste,* would soon arrive. "Our mayor promised him that the day water flows there will be a great celebration paid for by the city," wrote Emilie. In May 1844, King Louis Philippe set his seal on a decree of public utility which confirmed the agreement Zola had won from Aix, and fifteen months later papers were notarized that gave legal existence to a joint-stock company called "Société du Canal Zola," with headquarters in Paris. As director, he received several hundreds of shares, each worth five hundred francs. What is more , his seventy-year concession stipulated that he be paid between thirty and forty-five thousand francs yearly, depending on the volume of water needed by the city. In an era when two francs represented a day's wage for the average worker and thirty thousand the annual stipend of a senator, he stood to join France's plutocratic elite.

This led him to indulge his generous nature more freely, as one deduces from the account he opened with an expensive Paris tailor, who fitted out his entire family (father-in-law included), and from the con-

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siderable bill for jewelry purchased at Girard's on the rue d'Alger. "My father had lived in a comfortable style, without thought of saving money" is how Zola remembered it. Having so often been brought low, however, he was not altogether unmindful of the formidable responsibilities his wife would find thrust upon her if she unexpectedly became a widow. Since Emilie married Zola without benefit of a contract, the court could award creditors whatever she inherited, and creditors there were aplenty, even after he reduced their number by pledging away all but a hundred and twenty-one of his shares. He therefore made arrangements, during a long sojourn in Paris, to reconstitute his marriage under the regime known as *séparation des biens,* which meant dissolving their joint estate. This legal ceremony took place on November 12, 1846, or five months before it proved to have been a rehearsal for the definitive separation.

Eventually, details of that separation found their way into one of Zola's novels, *Une page d'amour,* where Hélène Mouret pictures the grief she felt on emerging alone from the large, bare hotel room in which she had spent a week nursing her doomed husband. But among the many episodes of the *Rougon-Macquart,* there is nowhere transfigured one particular incident that must have borne home on young Emile a sense of the majestic void left by his father. It was related in *La Provence* on July 29, 1847:

> Yesterday . . . Monsieur Thiers, along with messieurs Aude, mayor of Aix; Borély, attorney general; Boyrand, deputy mayor; Leydet, justice of the peace, and several other notabilities unexpectedly went to visit the construction site of the Zola canal, on the Infernets heights. They were received amid noisy detonations which the workers, who were alerted at the last minute, had prepared for their benefit . . . . The director availed himself of the opportunity to introduce to Monsieur Thiers the young son of M. Zola. The illustrious orator welcomed with utmost grace the child as well as the widow of a man whose name will live among those of the region's benefactors.

Standing on the heights amid people who would honor him as someone great in his own right became for him not just an achievable goal but an imperative fraught with the underlying terror that achievement might cost him his life. "My father passes like a shadow through memories of my early childhood," he later wrote, and indeed, François Zola had cast a very long shadow, against which he was to measure himself thenceforth. It would accompany his every morning, when he entered his own study as an intruder, to engage in what he described as "a continual exercise of will over doubt." Of that he did not yet know anything. He knew only that a boy bereft of his father was radically different from other children.

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An apparition of the Villa Doria Pamphili

by Mark Helprin

Rome may be eternal, but the Rome that even I once knew, twenty years ago, no longer exists. As in America, everything in Italy seems to be produced and consumed in volumes that mathematically explain the death of something that there used to be, called slow time. In the Hudson River town where I grew up, woodland and farms have been replaced by complexes of condominiums. In Rome, sheep are no longer driven through the center of the city in flocks directed by shepherds with floppy hats and crooks. My wife and I climbed Mount Aetna in a storm, and when we took refuge in an alpine hut (now destroyed by a new eruption), we discovered a group of mountain guides hypnotized in the semi-darkness by a festival of Woody the Woodpecker cartoons on a generator-powered color television set.

You have probably read ten thousand essays that decry the modern world. You have seen ten thousand shapeless and incomprehensible conceptual paintings that leap to demonstrate the barrenness of the twentieth century (and here it is not possible to separate the dancer from the dance). You have heard ten thousand atonal concertos (all right, five thousand) that express the confusion and anarchy of our times. And you have undoubtedly read enough forlorn and despairing or accusatory and righteous fiction to fill the holds of a supertanker.

Why then am I lamenting the absence of some sheep trotting through the center of Rome? I'm not. I know that cities change. I know that for a child of today what I think of as a light dusting of the pumpkins will someday be the deep snows of yesteryear. I look forward with a pleasant anticipation, rather than dread, to continuing technological transformations. Years ago, I bought a wordprocessor. I have recently done a great deal of statistical analysis. In short, I do not decry the technical modernisms that many other people decry. Why should I?

The other day, I was running in the Villa Doria Pamphili, which is a garden about the size of Central Park but far more beautiful. I was coming over a hill on the other side of the Via Aurelia, crossing a meadow filled with bleached grasses and an overwhelming mass of blood-red poppies. It was early in June, the sky was cloudless, there was a hot wind, and I was running so hard that my face was flushed and I was dripping wet. In this meadow on top of the hill I came upon an apparition—an ancient with a cane and two magnificent white *baffi* (moustaches), who wore a white suit and had a white handkerchief tied onto his head with four graceful little knots that made him resemble a sheep with a double set of ears.

My presence seemed to have hurt him. I am, by coloring and physique, identifiable as a foreigner, and, compared to him, I am young. Although he did not know that my shoes were computer designed with gas bubbles in the soles to lessen stress on the knee, and that my shorts and shirt were

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"engineered" by some spin-off company in the Silicon Valley, he probably had the right idea about what I was wearing.

But he was not distressed because of any of these things, each of which (except perhaps my youth) was forgivable. Then why was he uncomfortable with me? After all, in 1947, when I was born, he was in his prime. He had fought the First World War and lived through the Second, and had set the modern world to spinning. I merely inherited it from him, and my generation has been a good deal less enthusiastic about it than has his. So why does he blame me because slow time is dead, there are no more sheep driven through Rome, and the snows are perpetually shallow?

He doesn't. He is a complicated man, and perhaps it would be best if he spoke for himself. His name is Alessandro Giuliani. He was born in Rome in 1890, and is now ninety-three years of age. He received a doctorate in the philosophy of aesthetics from the University of Bologna in 1915. Within minutes of this event, it seemed, he was fighting in the Veneto. He then spent most of the rest of the war in combat with the Austrians in the South Tyrol, since he had been an alpinist before he was a soldier and this skill was much in demand in that theater. Until recently, he went to the mountains in the summer and walked from town to town across the various ranges that he had known so well during the war. Now he is not able to do that, so he takes his exercise in the park. I have come to know him well. Though he is the subject of a novel that I am now writing, and though I made him up, I didn't really make him up, and I have found in writing about him that he has always had the upper hand, and has been able to lead me to places of which I had not known. I first met him in a railroad station in southern Italy in 1964. He was less patient with me then than he is now, though he was at that time somewhat more forgiving, if only because he was amused by my errors.

I have asked him to tell me what it is he finds reprehensible about our age—since he takes it upon himself to look so sadly on modern runners in the heat—and I quote his reply:

"Perhaps my expression," he writes, "was simply that of an old man recoiling from the brutality of youth. To a man of my age, it appears that young people speak loudly, move rashly, and are too fast and aggressive not to be threatening. And perhaps I was saying that young men like you have no traditions other than those you have taken up on your own account. I was alarmed to see you hurrying through nature. This you must do, as I understand it, because your sensibilities are the products of defeat.

"Before the First World War, a scribe in my father's law office by the name of Orfeo Quatta went insane as he watched his profession fall with the advent of the typewriter. By chance, I was the one who had the most contact with him during his lunacy. I was a student at Bologna at the time, and he came up there, I guess, to warn the world of what would happen to it if it were to forsake the art of penmanship for machine writing. His ravings were genuinely prophetic, and only seventy years later am I fully able to understand what the madness enabled him to see so early.

"At that time, we sought the postulates of human existence in nature, and they were provided in great abundance and in great variety—but never varying individually. There is nothing in the universe except proportion, the relation of one thing to another. The relative weights and placements of various charges of energy are what make an atom. Color is determined by the simple variation of wavelengths of light, sound by the relation of the amplitude and the frequency of proportionally distinct generations of kinetic energy, etc. On a larger scale, illusions propagated by varying proportions are what we know as the natural world. Not surprisingly, when something pleases or displeases us, is good for us or bad for us, attracts us or repels us, it is due to where it is placed in relation to other things, and how much of it there is or how intense it is (which is nothing more than the way its internal elements are placed in proportion to each

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other)—all essentially spatial relationships.

"Nature is a magnificent elaboration on just a very few proportions. The secret of its beauty, I believe, is that it is immediately reducible to its basic elements. No matter how complicated it gets (and it can be complicated and mystifying far beyond our understanding), it is always consistent in terms of its own rules, and if you, so to speak, press it, it can justify its arabesques with quick and basic citations not too many steps removed from your point of interception.

"That we should have accessible a perfect set of principles by which all things can be related to all other things is matched only by the fact that nature itself is unlimited in its distances, its power, and its possibilities of permutation and combination.

"Now, given this extraordinary package—perfect consistency and enticing limitlessness—what do we do with it? I'll tell you. For thousands of years, we learned from it, we worked within it, we abided by it, and we lived it. All our finest efforts were analogies of its self-evident perfections. We used it to measure, to limit, to feel, to know. Without necessarily thinking of it, our artists were practitioners of its rules. In their attempts to imitate nature, they always came up short. That coming up short, however, was often so refreshing and different that it seemed to be outside of or beyond the natural (or even above it). But it was not. Dante, for example, as an imitator of nature, had his model and tried as hard as he could to portray things as beautifully as God had made them. Though he never succeeded completely, he knew precisely the rules by which he was bound, and he used them with extraordinary humility and to extraordinary effect. The great artist is the artist who can see very clearly the limitless beauty that is all around, and who then sets out to capture it as best he can, despite the inevitable changes in its form that result from his imperfect retrieval. If in this process he becomes willful or capricious, then he ignores the truth of what he sees in favor of his pride in manipulating its elements. Some artists may imagine that they have seen something that is not there. Wrong. It is all there. They may have simply altered the positioning of its elements and banged it up until it becomes impossible to recognize. In modern times, this is supposedly an accomplishment—but only because it has heretofore been perceived as a failure, and modern times are notably contrary.

"Nature, being perfect, needs neither amendment nor willful distortion. Though boredom is sometimes cited as justification for the perversion of natural principles, in a system of limitless possibilities boredom implies the inability of the user rather than the inadequacy of the system. There have been calls to amend nature for as long as there have been those who have no understanding of its perfection, and history is littered with the wreckage of their heresies.

"In this century, the artists decided to make their own rules, to design their own postulates, to break with nature. In so doing they were superficially imitative of the dominant force of their times, science, because science may *seem,* to the uneducated, to defy nature. But quite to the contrary, science is an ever developing understanding of nature, and scientists play scrupulously by its rules. They are forever referring to the basic laws and relations that are the universal inheritance. And when their powers seem to override natural forces, it is in fact because they have recognized them without distortion. Like Dante's, their understanding and power come from recognition and clear vision. And that is why they have moved so far and so fast, outdistancing by leagues and leagues all the artists, social scientists, and other manipulators and interpreters of reality who work according to systems and postulates that they themselves have created without reference to nature and without the humility of science.

"The sorest point of modern art is its incomprehensibility. That, anyway, is the plaint of most of the population, which is quickly parried by legions of aesthetes who seem to be ready at any time to jump into the breach with an explanation—as if art had anything

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to do with explanation in the first place.

"Now the artist tries to work apart from nature, ignoring its rules in favor of either his own or those of his school. But neither he nor his school can create new shapes, new colors, new sounds. They can only reorganize. If in reorganizing they pay no heed to the universal ratios and proportions which nature comprises, and with which we are familiar by constant observation of the work of art that is the world, then they will be either severely limited or ridiculous. They will be limited because whatever system they can independently devise will quickly play itself out in comparison to nature, in which everything connects richly to everything else.

"The best way to understand this is to think of the planning analogy. Imagine a void, in which you must plan a garden. You must take into account, first of all, the construction of the basic units of energy, and of matter, and their staggering interrelations (they do tend to move rather fast). You must prepare to bind them together chemically, hold them fast by gravitation, and arrange for them to respond to temperature change, light, and other forces for which you must devise a schedule of entrances and exits. You must organize, atom by atom, molecule by molecule, solid by solid, gas by gas, hundreds of thousands of biochemical operations and processes, and you must do this in reference to all the other variables. There is a constraint on your work, however. You cannot do it the way nature has done it already. You must make new rules from the beginning.

"There is, of course, no way that any human agency could accomplish the task I have just outlined, even if the powers and capacities of mankind were to be multiplied a billionfold. When a peasant plants a few potatoes, he does not create his own gravity, molecular organization, or very much else. But if he plays by the rules of nature, he will harvest bushels and bushels of potatoes. The more he refines his understanding of the exact ways in which nature works, the more bushels of potatoes he will harvest. If he or anyone else ignores, defies, or attempts to abridge the rules, they will come out with nothing, not even potatoes.

"This process, rather than adherence to particular styles or conventions, is the reason for the austerity in modern art, even when the canvases are nauseated with paint, or the busy-boxes are so full of little angles and objects that the Collier brothers would be moved to protest. The many capricious and isolated artificial systems upon which it is postulated are severely limited. At the most, they will generate—instead of the infinite reverberations and counter-reverberations of even the simplest naturally based systems—an idea or two. And when the work is pushed beyond its one or two ideas, it becomes ridiculous, chaotic, dissonant. Thus the tangles and jumbles of modern painting, the atonality of modern concertos, and the studied incomprehensibility of modern poetry. It is all the extension of an inadequate system of postulates to the breaking point—which is always close by—and it yields chaotic results that are amazingly similar, for they all have the same origin and the same limitations, and in defying nature they will all reap the same wind.

"Modern art cannot exist without explanation. That is, without each artist, each school, or surrogates self-appointed or otherwise, laying down premises and postulates. Whereas art that is made in reference to nature can be explained ad infinitum and from many a perspective, it need not be explained to be understood. In fact, the deepest level of explanation will rest far beyond words or ideas. It will be appreciable for as long as nature lasts, and comprehensible in greater or lesser degree to anyone who can analogize. And, in greater or lesser degrees, most people can. Modern art will always need a key, an explanation, or a code. None of the keys, codes, or explanations will last very long, and when the future will have to deal with artifacts that cannot be understood by means of universal laws, such artifacts will finally and justly be understood as games and designs.

"It is clear to me that in this century the

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theorists of art have led the way to very poor results. The artists have followed, straining to satisfy not abundant nature and its world of unchecked opportunities, but conceits and devices of their own making. The language of art is no longer a language of faith and delight, but one of labor and explanation. We have abandoned an instrument of richness and perfection in favor of the barren experimentalism that we then seek to justify in setting down the rules by which it must be approached. But our rules are insufficient. They are neither full enough, flexible enough, or well enough interconnected to serve even the transient and limited purposes for which they are designed.

"Orfeo Quatta, the displaced scribe, felt this in his heart. The last time I saw him, in the train station of Bologna, he looked at me with pity. Until recently, I thought it was the wars that he had foreseen, but they were only a part of it. He had seen nature forsaken, and because of that he pitied me and he pitied the century to come.

"Perhaps my expression in the Villa Doria Pamphili was too much influenced by that of Orfeo Quatta seventy years before, especially since, unlike him, I believe that nature will not reject even the slightest plea for restoration. She is always here, and always will be. And, if you believe as I do, then you may wish to take into account these ramblings of a very old man, you may wish to pass close by instead of taking to the other side of the field in the Villa Doria the next time we meet, and you may wish to forgive me for my sadness."

It hardly matters that sheep are no longer driven through the center of Rome. There are still sheep. Rome still has a center. It can be done again at any time. Nature, all powerful, is in no danger and has not gone astray. We have gone astray. But God and nature strongly favor restoration and redemption. They tell us so each spring. They tell us so by the making of generations, in the passing of knowledge from the weak to the strong, and from the old to the young. The perfection cannot be abridged. Of this I have faith, and the next time I run through the bleached grasses and blood red poppies in the Villa Doria Pamphili, I will hold to Alessandro Giuliani's side of the field.

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Herman Melville
by Walker Percy

What does a present-day Southern writer make of Melville? Strangely enough, what first comes to mind is not the greatness of *Moby-Dick* or the strange, flawed originality of *Billy Budd,* but rather a certain chagrin and a sort of melancholy wonder.

What did it feel like, one wonders, to have written *Moby-Dick,* an experience which Melville called being broiled in hellfire, and which was surely a triumphant taking-on of hell and coming through? It was surely akin to the sense of triumph Dante felt emerging from his own inferno. But to write *Moby-Dick,* publish it, sell a few hundred copies, see it drop dead and go out of print, disappear apparently forever, and then to spend the last twenty years of one's life as a customs inspector on the New York docks, so obscure and forgotten that a British critic visiting America couldn't even find you—what did it feel like? And then at the end, to write *Billy Budd,* again, as far as Melville was concerned, stillborn, unpublished, unread. What did *that* feel like? Was there a certain species of satisfaction in living the most ordinary life imaginable? Was it an exercise in obscurity like that of Bartleby the scrivener, riffling through the valises of rich folk returning from the grand tour and then going home to humble quarters?

And where did Melville come from? A lapsed Calvinist from a middle-class New York family. My grandmother in Georgia might have said of the Melvilles, had she known them and been asked about them: "The Melvilles? Well, of course, you know, they were in trade." That meant that they didn't belong to the upper class of the professions—the doctors, lawyers, plantation owners, and people of leisure. It was the latter, presumably, who had the time and the wherewithal to write, read, cultivate the arts, and so forth. They had the libraries; and they often went to Europe for their education. But I confess to a certain chagrin. Why? Because there was not a single Melville—or anything close—in the entire antebellum South, from the Virginia Tidewater to the New Orleans Vieux Carré and the River Road. A huge country, with an extensive leisure class, close European connections, and plenty of Calvinists, lapsed and unlapsed. And plenty of people in trade. Why no Melville? The conventional wisdom has a ready answer: the slavery did you in.

Well, yes and no. The Greeks—Aeschylus and Sophocles, for instance—had slaves: it didn't do them in. But the South got stuck with slavery because it was profitable. While the Melvilles were in the dry-goods business and didn't stand to make a nickel on slaves, Southern writers, political and otherwise, were feeling guilty because they spent most of their time defending slavery. Now, defending slavery is a strange occupation and it takes a lot of energy. It's impossible to imagine, for example, a South Carolina writer in the 1850s thinking about whales, Rousseau, and original sin.

On the other hand, defending cannibals

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and making a case for an earthly paradise in the valley of the Typee is also a strange occupation for a writer. And being obsessed with the innocence of natural man is surely as pernicious an activity as defending slavery. But these flowerings of genius are mysterious affairs, and I'm not sure that even the critics know the answers. One might also ask: Where were the New England writers in the 1920s and '30s, when the Nashville poets and the Mississippi novelists were getting on their way?

But there's something else afoot in Melville's case. It has to do with what the structuralists call intertextuality. Now, there is a lot of real goofiness in structuralist criticism. One can imagine a structuralist critique of *Moby-Dick* in the style of Lévi-Strauss: a table of binary opposites listing right whales in one column and wrong whales in another, and the right whales are the sperm whales and the wrong whales are wrongly called right whales. One could, "deconstruct" Melville, too, discounting his authorial intention and putting forward the thesis that *Moby-Dick* is really about a homosexual relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg. It has been done, in fact, and it may or may not be true; but it's not really important because that's not what excited Melville and it's not what excites the reader.

But there is something interesting about the idea of Hawthorne as an intertext for Melville, or Melville as a countertext for Hawthorne, which is another way of saying that it is impossible to imagine Melville writing *Moby-Dick* without the somber figure of Hawthorne at his shoulder. The structuralists are right about intertextuality. But I believe it can be stated in ordinary language—without the jargon. There's a strange paradox about writing novels. It is simply this: there's no occupation in the universe that is lonelier and that at the same time depends more radically on a community, a commonwealth of other writers.

I needn't mention the half-dozen extraordinary writers and thinkers confined to a couple of small towns in Massachusetts. But there's a difference between the mediated loneliness of a writer like Melville, for whom Hawthorne stood close by (whether actually present or not) and the absolute loneliness of a Southern writer of the 1840s or '50s. For all I know, there were dozens of potential Hawthornes and Melvilles and Thoreaus in the Virginias and Carolinas of the 1840s. But there's no such thing as a sovereign and underived text, except possibly for Faulkner, who came from God knows where.

Perhaps the South at that time was too big, too well off, the writers too scattered, too politicized, too full of hubris. Who needed to write? I like to imagine that what happened to literature in the South in the 1920s and '30s was the same sort of thing that happened to New England a hundred years before. It's just that the post-Christianity and alienation of the Massachusetts writer took a hundred years to reach Mississippi.

Try to imagine Melville today writing in New York about his obsession with the natural depravity of man and blaming God for it. He would be referred to an analyst. It is hard to say who would be more certifiable at Yale or Harvard now—Melville, who believed in the depravity of man and blamed God for it, or Dostoevsky, who believed in the depravity of man and looked to God to save him from it.

The common denominator, I think, between Southern writing of this century and Northeastern writing of the last is a certain relation of the writer to a shared body of belief. I don't mean that a writer has to be informed by a belief like Dante's. But surely there's a certain dialectical relation to a shared belief that helps a writer, even if the relation is unbelief, as in the case of Euripides, who had no use for the gods and didn't lose any sleep over it, or Melville, who had no use for God but could never get over it.

The vocabulary remains intact; there is a common universe of discourse. It is shared by believer and scoffer, even when the scoffer is like Melville or Joyce and cannot relax in his unbelief. Take these factors, a

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shared belief or a shared warfare against belief, a major talent like Melville's, a community of one's peers, and a common universe of discourse and you've got the makings of a major literature.

Moby-Dick was not only dedicated to Hawthorne, it was written at him. Written to the reader, yes, but always past Hawthorne, with an eye cocked for Hawthorne's approval at the very least. At the most, it was written to amaze Hawthorne, out-Hawthorne Hawthorne. Not only Man is depraved, but God too. We know what Melville thought of Hawthorne. He ranked him with Shakespeare, but in a peculiar sense. By Melville's own admission, it was Hawthorne's great power of blackness that appealed to his Calvinist sense of innate depravity and original sin. We know how Melville felt after he wrote *Moby-Dick,* and he gave the book to Hawthorne. He said he had written a wicked book, broiled in hellfire, and that he felt fine, as spotless as a lamb, happy, content. Here he used an expression, a strange expression—he referred to the "ineffable sociabilities" he felt in himself.

Surely this is the key to the paradox—the ineffable sociability in writing. Intertextuality, if you please. As lonely as is the craft of writing, it is the most social of vocations. No matter what the writer may say, the work is always written to someone, for someone, against someone. The happiness comes from the ineffable sociabilities, when they succeed, when the writing works and somebody knows it.

But this still doesn't explain where *Moby-Dick* came from, and why Southern writers to this day are knocked out by it in a way they are not knocked out by Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, or even Hawthorne, and in a way Northern writers may not be. The Northern intellectual generally finds *Moby-Dick* comprehensible to the degree he can attach this or that symbol to it—hence the vague descriptions one is always reading about *Moby-Dick* being an allegory about evil.

Now, allegories are dull affairs. I've never read a readable one. And *Moby-Dick* is not dull. Melville had other fish to fry—if you will forgive the expression.

I like to imagine that *Moby-Dick* came to pass in the following way. Like many great works of literature, it was a consequence not merely of great gifts, but also of great good luck. Perhaps one could even speak of Providence or grace. But here is where the luck comes in. One sets out to make up a story, spin a yarn, probably for money. After all, that's how one makes one's living. Perhaps one has fought in a war, bummed around Europe, had six wives, signed up on a whaler out of Nantucket, jumped ship in the South Seas, lived with cannibals. One has become famous writing about it. One has become a sort of Louis L'Amour of the South Seas, and gets in a few licks at the missionaries for good measure. So, what to do, the writer? You start another whaling yarn. Why not? But then, something untoward, extraordinary happens. As the narrative unfolds, one becomes aware that in its very telling something else is being told, a ghostly narrative of great import told by a ghostly self, perhaps one's own shadow self.

This is not to say that at the beginning one might not have had some species of allegory in mind, especially when one has named the chief characters Ishmael and Ahab—the one after a Biblical character kicked out into the desert with God's permission, the other after a bad king God had assured would end by having his blood licked by dogs. An allegory is a dreary business. What is not dreary is a narrative that unfolds not merely itself, but oneself and others' selves. There's no straining for a symbol of truth. The narrative is the thing.

That is why *Moby-Dick* is so good and *The Confidence Man* is so boring. The happiness of Melville in *Moby-Dick* is the happiness of the artist discovering, breaking through into the freedom of his art. Through no particular virtue of his own, he hit on a mother lode. The novel—the freedom of its form often paralyzing to the novelist—suddenly finds itself being shaped by a larger unity which cannot be violated. Everything works. One

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kills six birds with every stone. One can even write a treatise on cetology, which comes off as a kind of theology.

Objective correlatives are easy pickings, lying around like Sutter's gold nuggets. One describes as simple a thing as a wooden crutch, a wire-shaped piece of wood which holds a harpoon, and it turns into a theory of literature. One describes the try-pots, the hellish fire, and the heat amidships of the *Pequod* at full sail through the night, and it becomes one's very soul, both damned and freed.

The freedom and happiness of the artist is attested by his playfulness, his tricks, his malice, his underhandedness, his naughtiness, his hoodwinking the reader. So happy is the metaphorical distance between the novelist and his narrative that he's free to cover his tracks at will. Not only do I not have to strive to mean such-and-such, he seems to say, but I deny that I mean it. I might mean the opposite, because with the *Pequod* under full sail through the night with its try-pots blazing I don't have to worry about a thing. The great whale is as sportive as the *Pequod*; nothing can stop the one but the other. No wonder Melville told Hawthorne: I would sit down and dine with you and all the gods in old Rome's pantheon.

To the Southerner, then, here's the luck of Melville: that the novelists's terrible loneliness has somehow stumbled into the ineffable sociability Melville spoke of. Melville impresses Southern writers for the same reason Dostoevsky impresses Southerners. Neither was afraid to deal with ultimate questions. It may be that the South, which has been called a Christ-haunted place, is something like New England a hundred years ago.

Melville is Dostoevsky turned inside out. Both men saw the depravity of man. One saw it as the occasion of his salvation, the other blamed it on God. Melville is perhaps the lesser writer, not because one might disagree with his theology and philosophy, but because in the end both are perhaps incoherent.

Dostoevsky would never have put up with the Rousseauean nonsense that Melville swallowed hook, line, and sinker. In the end, Melville ends up with the eminently readable science fiction of *Billy Budd*, a queer mishmash of Schopenhauer and Rousseau. One hears that *Billy Budd* is about innocence and evil. It's both a lot better and a lot worse than that. The evil is the last vestige of Melville's Calvinism—man's depravity.

In Melville, the only believable part of Judeo-Christianity (as Schopenhauer put it)—the innocence—comes not from human nature but from outer space. Billy Budd is man before the Fall, man exempted from the Fall, a creature dragged in from some loony planet invented by Melville and Rousseau, who neither understands evil nor needs salvation from it. Dostoevsky would have laughed out loud. Billy Budd, in Dostoevsky's hands, would have turned out to be a child molester.

And therefore, a good deal more believable. But Melville was not afraid to address such matters, and that's why he means so much to us.

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Art

Art and urbanity: the Manet retrospective

by Jed Perl

Family money plays a great role in the art of the nineteenth century. Moderate family allowances enabled Corot and Cézanne to leave behind the marketplaces of Parisian art and paint their unsalable paintings; and Van Gogh's bouquets, orchards, and fields would probably never have come into being were it not for brother Theo's support, which was partly emotional, but which would have been meaningless if it had not also been financial. Edouard Manet, backed by a large family fortune, had no pressing financial motive for catering to contemporary taste, but he did not really use his money, as did Corot and Cézanne, to buy freedom from the pressures of the Parisian art world. For Manet, family money meant that he could paint as he wished and regard the politics and machinations with a certain equanimity—he didn't need to live off sales. But it also meant that he could conduct himself as the artist in society—elegant, fashionable, charismatic—while maintaining an ambivalent relation with those official artistic circles that traditionally controlled an artist's access to society. Wealth imbued Manet with a floating, Olympian grace. He could be as unconventional as he pleased and yet always feel at one with the world.

Manet died a hundred years ago, and to mark the centenary of his death the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum of Art have together organized a great retrospective.[1] It is a complicated, multifaceted affair—just what one would expect from the work of one of the most complex figures in all of nineteenth-century art. Manet was a vanguardist whose paintings looked, by contemporary accounts, different from most everything being done at the time; yet he sometimes acted almost surprised at the violent reactions his works evoked. His career encompassed Hispanomania, Japonisme, and Impressionism, the print-making revival and plein-air painting. He was the centerpiece of an avant-garde circle that met at the Café Guerbois, he had the tastes and manners of the most elegant of the Parisian *haute bourgeoisie,* and he was close friends with Baudelaire, Zola, and Mallarmé. In accounts of Manet's career the beautiful female visitors to the studio, the fights with officialdom, the passionate vanguardism, the surprising reversals of the critics, the fashionable books, masked balls, and summer holidays merge into a panorama that is almost too highly

1 "Manet" was shown at the Grand Palais in Paris from April 22 to August 8, and can be seen at the Metropolitan Museum in New York from September 10 to November 27. The show was organized by François Cachin, Curator of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, and Charles Moffett, former Curator of the Metropolitan Museum's Department of European Paintings, now Curator in Charge, Department of Paintings of the De Young Museum in San Francisco, in collaboration with Michel Melot, Director of the Print Department at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

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colored. This *was* Manet's life, and yet in the midst of it all he remains somehow pale, elusive.

In the biographies and critical studies we meet a barrage of facts. Scandals, failures, successes followed one another willy-nilly. Manet moved through it all, aware of what was going on around him, sometimes hurt, sometimes disappointed, sometimes surprised. Though he was a famous raconteur, he was reticent when it came to the matter of his own work and career, and his motivations and his feelings are almost impossible to understand. The official Salon system was too powerful a force in nineteenth-century art for any artist to entirely turn his back on it, but there was to Manet's relations with officialdom an almost extravagant ambivalence. In 1867, when Manet discovered that only the work of artists who had previously won medals in the Salon would be included at the upcoming Exposition Universelle, he decided to organize a private, alternate one-man exhibition in a pavilion he had erected at great expense near the Exhibition site. This was a clear challenge to officialdom, yet six years later Manet was painting *Le Bon Bock,* a slickly sentimental portrait of an affable bohemian—pipe in mouth, beer in hand—that could only have been calculated to please official taste. Predictably, it made a great hit at the Salon of 1873. Manet made passionate alliances with the young Impressionists and gave money to Monet. Yet in 1874, when the Impressionists organized their Société Anonyme, Manet would not take part, probably because he felt official recognition was now within his grasp and he did not want to make so strong a statement of disaffection. In 1881, now critically ill with syphilis, he finally won a second-class medal in the Salon and thereby gained the right to exhibit without going through the jury process. Though many felt that the honor, coming so late and in such an equivocal form, amounted to a kind of insult, Manet was not bitter; he was in fact delighted.

There is something psychologically impressive here. Manet was able to put up a good fight, but he was not, finally, deterred from his goals by even the most powerful rebuffs. He dealt masterfully with the complexities of the social world. But he also paid a price, as many artists have, for his hyperawareness of the pressures and imperatives of the world around him. In the wake of the overwhelmingly negative response to *Olympia* when it was exhibited at the Salon of 1865 Manet wrote a distraught letter to Baudelaire, who was living at the time in Belgium. To Manet, Baudelaire wrote words of encouragement, but he was clearly concerned. To the critic Champfleury, Baudelaire wrote of Manet's "weak character," and to an old friend, Mme. Meurice, he made what must be his most revealing comments on Manet. "Manet has such light and brilliant faculties that it would be unfortunate if he became discouraged. He will never overcome the lacunae in his temperament. But he has a temperament, that is the main thing." What exactly Baudelaire meant by temperament is not clear, but he did say, in another context, that "an artist without temperament is not worthy of painting pictures." Manet *had* temperament, this vital element, but he did not have enough or the right kind. Despite Manet's talent—his facility, ease, grace—there was missing a central impulse, some essence of character that could carry all before it.

Spurred on by the eventfulness of the career, Manet scholars have endeavored to map out the terrain fully—as if *then* everything would make sense. The friendship with Baudelaire, the infatuation with Spanish pictures, characters, and customs, the borrowings from the old masters—they are all studied, explicated. But in most of the literature these explanations become little more than a series of frames that, while not necessarily obscuring the artist, do not really bring him into higher relief either. For all the connections with Baudelaire—for all the affinities of subject matter—the essentially light, buoyant spirit of Manet's art remains alien to the dark, outrageous originality of the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal.* What, finally, does Manet's interest in bullfights,

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guitarists, and toreador pants tell us except that he was—as so many artists, great and not great, have been—susceptible to current fashions? And what do his borrowings from Raphael and Giorgione, the topic of endless discussion, really tell us about *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe,* a rather tenuously constructed picture that is in danger of sinking under the weight of its elaborate exegesis? Manet's seemingly contradictory liking for Raphael and Hokusai, for fancy dress and scenes from everyday life have been, in countless ways, ingeniously reconciled. But the elements never fall into place to clarify a coherent artistic personality. Not surprisingly, Manet discussions have a way of spilling over into general discussions of modernity and the relation of avant-garde and officialdom in the nineteenth century—as if the artist himself were too hard to pin down. Taken as set pieces, certain of his paintings, with their daring brushwork and bold compositions, can be used to frame great issues in nineteenth-century art. But when the issues are set aside and the paintings are allowed to speak for themselves, there emerges an artist who is not anywhere near as large as he has been made to appear.

The Manet retrospective is a big show. There are some hundred paintings, about fifty drawings, watercolors, and pastels, and a remarkably rich group of another fifty prints, including many alternate states and impressions. The enormous catalogue contains exhaustive entries on everything and reproduces all the paintings in color.[2]

What we are seeing in New York is not, however, exactly what was seen in Paris. There are about a dozen paintings that were seen in Paris that are not in New York, and about the same number that are only joining the show in New York. This seems, by the numbers, like a fair trade, but none of the American additions is especially important—and some of them are mediocre—and the Paris show contained a number of crucial pictures that did not come to New York. Above all, New York is without the two paintings which gave Manet his singular place in the nineteenth-century wars between vanguardism and officialdom: *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia.* Almost as unfortunate is the absence in New York of the two Manet works that are most closely linked with Baudelaire: the powerful portrait of Baudelaire's mistress, Jeanne Duval, and the blunt, highly charged *Music in the Tuileries,* painted as Manet was being introduced by Baudelaire to his philosophy of the painter of modern life and to the art of Constantin Guys. Many visitors will regret the absence of *Lola de Valence* and *Argenteuil*; I regret as well not being able to see the *Portrait of Henry Bernstein as a Child,* a picture of a young boy—white sailor suit against dark ground—painted at the very close of Manet's career, which seems, at least in reproduction, to have some of the sweet yet sober informality of Picasso's wonderful portraits of his son Paulo. Though none of the changes among drawings, watercolors, and prints is so important, my impression is that the French selection was richer here as well—if for nothing else, for its lovely drawings of cats. Whatever the deficiencies of the New York version, the two-hundred-odd works included here offer a very full picture of what was really a very brief career. Manet's great visibility sometimes makes it hard to remember that he died at only fifty-one (of syphilis contracted in his youth) and was, after a somewhat late start as a painter, active for scarcely more than two decades—the 1860s and 1870s.

At the Metropolitan Museum the Manet show has been mounted in the temporary exhibition halls at the north end of the second floor. This succession of large rooms works well for a retrospective, but the Metropolitan has fallen into some of its usual problems in lighting and design. Hanging

2 *Manet,* the catalogue of the show, was prepared by François Cachin, Charles Moffett, and Juliet Wilson Bareau and contains introductory essays by Cachin and Moffett as well as Anne Coffin Hanson and Michel Melot. It is published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in association with Harry Abrams; 548 pages, $39.50 hardback, $25 paper.

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works of paper in the same galleries as paintings is a good idea, for it enables us to compare preparatory and finished works side by side, but in practice it has meant that the lighting on the painting has to be kept dim so as to protect the works on paper from fading. We are all used to the lack of natural light in New York's museums and galleries, but it seems to me wrong to further complicate things by creating a situation where the paintings are also denied sufficient artificial light. As it is, the whole show is rather dimly lit, a problem that becomes disastrous in the final part of the show. Many of the galleries are painted light, pleasant neutral colors, and the brick-red in the first rooms, though too dark, does set off the pictures. But the treatment of the last two galleries leaves one wondering whether anyone in the Metropolitan's design department has any idea what it means to *look* at a painting. These rooms are painted a dark, matte blue that can only be described as macabre. This overpowering expanse of black-blue effectively blots out what little ambient light there may have been in these rooms to begin with, so that the paintings emerge, murkily lit by spotlights, out of a pervasive gloom. It is a strange way to treat any paintings and an absurd way to treat paintings that aim, above all else, to express a sense of light and air.

Though the Manet show is hung in a roughly rather than rigidly chronological manner, the progression of galleries at the Metropolitan gives a good sense of Manet's evolving concerns. In some sense I found the first gallery, which contains works mainly from the very beginning of the 1860s, to be the most compelling in the show. Everything here—from the portrait of the artist's parents to the bucolic nude to the reclining woman in Spanish dress—seems to have been conceived under the sign of Courbet, but there is to all of it as well an air of fresh, brave experimentation. Every subject is attacked head on, and there is in the brushwork a sense of the pleasure of finding things for the first time—of getting down in easy, mobile strokes of paint a cat, an orange, a boy, a dog. The color is bold, unequivocal. Brought together in this room, paintings that on their own would look slick or fatuous take on a different meaning. *La pêche,* a pastiche of seventeenth-century landscape ideas from the Metropolitan that has always seemed to me utterly without value, does not exactly now seem good, but it does seem genuinely bold and even daring—an authentic gesture. Even the stilted *Surprised Nymph,* a Courbetesque treatment of Manet's wife as a seated nude in a wooded setting, seems in this context a rather affecting attempt to bring a beloved model to life within a great bucolic tradition. In this *Surprised Nymph,* in the portrait of the artist's parents, in the *Boy with Dog,* and elsewhere in this room the faces, though they never rise to the level of great portraiture, do seem deeply felt. Manet's brush is searching out the emotional life of the sitter, and there is a sense that, even if we are not in the presence of revelations, we are in the presence of an artist who wants to reveal things.

This desire to reveal things—to paint with a kind of honesty—is felt with a new, direct, heightened urgency in the three paintings of modern life executed in 1862 and 1863 and not shown in New York: *Music in the Tuileries, Le déjeuner sur l'herbe,* and *Olympia.* Here the broad brushstrokes and the clear colors are brought into the service of three large attempts to get down on canvas exactly the world in which Manet lived, the brilliant bohemia and *haute bourgeoisie* of Paris. There is something impetuous, headstrong about these paintings. Manet did have a habit of quoting the masters, but the radical discrepancies in handling between the more fully worked-up figures and the sketchy settings in both *Music in the Tuileries* and *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe,* the odd, almost childish drawing of chairs and umbrellas in *The Tuileries,* and the rejection of conventional modeling in favor of blunt color contrasts—all reflect a need to communicate telegraphically, to bring the experience of life in the world directly onto the canvas.

This directness of approach is what gives to so many of Manet's prints of the 1860s

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their extraordinary power. In reproduction, works such as the various versions of the *Boy with a Sword, Lola de Valence,* and the *Gypsies* may seem much like the run of etched replicas of paintings that were done in the mid-nineteenth century, but no reproduction can prepare one for the force of Manet's etching technique. To look at these prints from the early 1860s firsthand is to see Manet responding directly to the feeling of the medium. The anarchic smatterings of lines, the gnarled, crabbed passages of hatching, the staccato marks—all give to the images a quality of both inevitability and absolute freedom, as if the images had burst out of an impulse sunk deep in the very essence of the etcher's plate.

Manet's first lithograph, *The Balloon* of 1862—executed on a stone sent to him by the publisher Cadart, who provided the occasion for many of the early etchings—is equally inspired, for here again Manet used a print medium's special qualities to preserve all the speed, bluntness, and informality of his hand. It may, indeed, be in the prints that Manet achieves most fully his helter-skelter vision of modern life. What in the paintings can match the inspired informality of the lithographs of *The Balloon* and the various versions of *The Races,* with their explosions of lines, or of the etching of *The Bear Trainer,* with its dense, messy texture? It is interesting, apropos of the great strength of the prints, to recall that the only observations that Baudelaire actually published about Manet deal with Manet not as a painter but as a printmaker. Many explanations have been suggested for this (by the time Manet was a public figure, Baudelaire was not publishing much anymore), but it is hard not to feel that Baudelaire saw in Manet's prints a freedom that he felt Manet had not as yet achieved as a painter.

Many would say that Manet's painting became freer as he went along, and that he finally achieved in painting the spontaneity that characterizes the best lithographs and etchings and gives them (to borrow Baudelaire's description of the etching technique) a quality "so naïf and profound, so gay and severe." I find the progress of Manet's career after *Music in the Tuileries, Le déjeuner,* and *Olympia* strangely erratic.

The long series of large, single figures that occupied Manet during much of the 1860s are gathered together in one room at the Metropolitan and make a rather dull effect. In *A Matador, The Fifer,* and the *Woman with a Parrot* (all from 1866) Manet's way with a brush became, for the first time, a bit formulaic. Each of these brilliantly painted figures is locked in a vacuum-like space. The figures seem unavailable, out of reach; the pictures are acts of contained showmanship in which anything untoward is suppressed, held in by the almost blotter-like effect of the dull backgrounds. These are images of disengagement. The figures feel very remote from us, but whereas the disengagement in *Olympia* may have carried its own challenge, here the figures give us no wish to engage with them. At this point Manet had become—I think for the first time—a showman in the bad sense of the term, in the same sense that his teacher Couture could be called a showman: the only impulse behind the dazzling technique is the artist's desire to dazzle.

Part of what one feels here in these large, single-figure portraits is the pressure, which Manet felt as strongly as any artist of the nineteenth century, to create grand statements that might make an effect amid the literally thousands of paintings that were submitted to the Salon juries and, if accepted, amid the hundreds of paintings hung in the annual Salons. Delacroix and Courbet each had a private vision of the grand subject that was reconcilable with the tradition of large set pieces encouraged by the Salon. But for Manet, who wanted both to please the Salon jury and retain his own more informal and less philosophic idea of subject, there was perhaps an insoluble conflict. Some of Manet's most embarrassing bows to the imperatives of the Salon system are his religious pictures, *The Dead Christ with Angels* of 1864 and *Jesus Mocked by the Soldiers* of 1864-5. There is no question that in

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an age of faith an artist of even moderate faith can create great religious art, but in a secular world such as Manet's, the impulse toward religious art must come from the artist himself. Manet was anything but a pious man, and these paintings bear that out, for despite their wrenching subjects and the obvious energy of the paint handling, the overall effects are of an extraordinary coldness and blandness. If one cares to, one can turn this upside down and argue that the very lack of affect in these pictures is meant to convey in some perhaps ironic manner modern man's loss of faith. Perhaps this is what Manet had in mind, and perhaps, as has been observed, there is some connection between these paintings and Renan's then recently published *Vie de Jésus,* which dealt with Christ as a secular, historical figure. Though few at the time found these paintings compelling and many found them ridiculous, perhaps their air of demystification did have a certain urgency. But paintings cannot hide behind the historical moment. They must be judged as they appear in the present, and Manet's religious pictures have, finally, as little urgency and as much artificiality of feeling about them as those of Bouguereau.

In 1856, Manet left the studio of his teacher Couture, where he had been a brilliant and controversial pupil. For the next ten years he studied the old masters, immersed himself in the artistic life of Paris, and painted a series of large, ambitious paintings. Ten years after departing Couture's studio Manet's search for official acceptance had turned into a series of disappointments (the outright rejections by the Salon, the confusion by viewers of some of his pictures with Monet's at the Salon of 1865) and *successes de scandale (Le déjeuner* at the Salon des Refusés, *Olympia,* and *Jesus Mocked by the Soldiers* at the Salon of 1865). It is not any accident that by the end of the 1860s Manet was turning from elaborate costume pieces and scenes of modern life framed in the heroic compositions and formats of the old masters to a more informal, ad hoc sort of composition and subject matter. By now Manet knew that there was no point, given official attitudes, in forcing himself into uncongenial modes.

Laid out at the Metropolitan in a series of large galleries, Manet's work from the end of the 1860s to about 1878 makes a highly variegated impression. Now, rather than putting everything on the line in one painting Manet began to treat the artistic vocation as a series of improvisations on a larger or smaller scale. His central ambition seems to have been to give to the painted surface the kind of aliveness that he had admired in Velásquez and Hals; to create painted surfaces that might evoke, through the very texture, weight, and density of the paint, the sensation of life. Manet's problem throughout this period was to find a way to sustain the speed, animation, and vitality of the first sketch on the canvas as he continued to work. His canvases began impulsively, and those that were done quite quickly or were left in an almost preliminary state have a brisk, animated quality. But Manet was unable to sustain the freedom of his brushwork as he worked further into paintings. If the greatest achievement of the painterly painter rests in merging the freedom of the sketch with the definition and resolution of a fully structured and articulated pictorial world, then Manet is hardly a great painterly painter.

No paintings of the 1870s are less formal than some of Manet's seascapes and landscapes, pictures laid in so casually as to seem not quite there. Yet in more worked-up compositions, such as *The Luncheon in the Studio* of 1868, the brushwork tightens and becomes almost constipated. Details such as the boy's collar and tie seem pasted on rather than organically related to the young man, and the maid and the large potted plant are shoved together like bric-a-brac in a junk store, unrelated by ambience or atmosphere. In *The Luncheon* the objects and parts of objects seem isolated, almost cut out of cardboard. Perhaps this is all intentional, a scheme to reject atmospherics in favor of a sharp focusing on individual elements and the slightly acid harmony made by the con-

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junction of oddly related elements; but there is something dreadfully conventional and fussy about the rendering of the individual elements that makes the painting ugly rather than interesting. In the *Lady with Fans* of 1873-4, when Manet tried to sustain his airy brushwork on a large scale, the effect is no more satisfying. Here a rather conventionally drawn woman is framed in staccato brushmarks that function like a battery of exclamation points announcing: "Isn't this exciting!" This is proto-Boldini—fast brushwork as a metaphor of stylishness.

Like most nineteenth-century artists, Manet accepted painting as a re-creation of reality, a kind of fiction, and like all advanced artists of the nineteenth century, he wanted to give new urgency and significance to art by transforming the very nature of artistic fiction. The syntax used to make the world into paintings had to be renewed, reformulated in a mode consonant with the deepest inclinations of the artist. The awkwardnesses in a painting like *The Luncheon* and the giddy brushwork in the *Lady with Fans* both grew out of this urgent sense of a need for renewal.

For Manet two distinct though somewhat overlapping pictorial ideas came into play in his efforts to *make it new*. The first of these was the idea of the brushstroke, somewhat or even totally detached from the object it purported to describe, as a carrier of emotional meaning. The second was the idea of a pictorial structure that derived not from the apprehension of the world as cast in deep, atmospheric space but from the idea of the canvas as a flat surface across which tensions act against each other laterally and planimetrically. Manet's idea of the brushstroke surely derived in part from his study of seventeenth-century painting; but, like his interest in planar composition, the idea of the "free" brushstroke also owed a large debt to the Orient.

Japonisme—the taste for things Japanese, be it Japanese bric-a-brac or the composition methods of Japanese brush painters—was a powerful force in France from the 1860s to the end of the century, and Manet felt its power as much as anyone. The history of Japonisme is highly engaging—full of pioneer collectors, clever and dedicated dealers, rapturous artists, much buying and selling, ideas, enthusiasms, innovations, and endless ramifications. Among the artists the unfamiliar compositions, perspectives, and structures of Japanese art had a profound effect, an effect most readily and fully assimilated in the graphic arts. In this vein Manet created many wonderful things, like the etching of a *Queue at the Butcher Shop* (1870-1), inspired by Hokusai and prophetic of the very best in Jacques Villon. It was possible to reconcile Japanese art, which tended (at least what was known in Europe) to be graphic, planar, and often quietistic, with Western traditions in the graphic arts. But Western oil painting, with its strong tendencies toward the coloristic, volumetric, and emotionally demonstrative proved less susceptible to the impact of Eastern models. To my mind Van Gogh was the only artist of the nineteenth century who was able to fully absorb Japanese influence within Western pictorial tradition: he adopted the flat areas of color and the implosive calligraphic lines while remaining an oil painter in the grand tradition, an heir of Rembrandt and Delacroix. I think that in the paintings of Whistler, Degas, and Manet the graphism of Japan acts mostly to dilute rather than re-channel the force of the Western tradition. The Japanese tradition is one of inks sunk into paper and cloth. When this tradition, which absorbs the graphic structure into the very fabric of the flat surface, is combined with oil paint, which ought to exist—alive—suspended on the surface of the canvas, the effect more often than not is to suffocate the energy of the oil paint.

Manet's "Japanese" seascapes are intriguing things but they do not seem *painted*—they die on the canvas. They would be more effective without their non-color color; they are ink drawings disguised as paintings—painted graphics. When Manet expanded these Japanese compositions to a larger scale he vacillated between continuing in the genre

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of the seascapes by leaving large areas of flat, thinly painted color as in *Boating* (1874) or, as in *The Railroad* (1872-3), by beginning with a fundamentally planar composition and then building up the individual elements in a fairly conventional, volumetric sort of way. Whichever way Manet developed his ideas, the ultimate effect lacked the quality of overall rhythmic expansiveness coupled with internal tension that is essential to bring a linear composition alive on the canvas. The surface of the canvas is quite simply not activated in ways exciting enough to bring the painter's conception to life. In a painting such as *Boating* one can appreciate the effort, sense that we have here a precursor of the brilliant chromatics of Bonnard, but what is actually there on the canvas as opposed to what we might imagine to be there is closed and lifeless.

In *Boating* there is an idea. Confronted by *The Conservatory* of 1879 it is difficult to know what Manet could possibly have had in mind. This is one of those Manets that make me lose almost total confidence in the artist. It is not so much that the painting is bad—what great painter has not painted terrible paintings?—it is that it is bad in an utterly unadventuresome, unexceptional, and banal sort of way. The composition—asymmetrical and oddly cropped—is Japanese in the way compositions by second-rate artists of the time, like Tissot, usually are: it mimics a format without any sense of what, in structural or metaphoric terms, that format might be meant to convey. And, just as would be the case with Tissot, the canvas is painted with a niggling, pedantic hand that turns everything into mud and plastic. The row of spokes on the back of the park bench is almost painful to look at, so laboriously and dully have they been rendered. The figures—the husband leaning over the bench, the wife looking off into the distance—are equally lifeless: fashion-plate mannequins painted with no sympathy and not a trace of irony either.

At the Metropolitan, *The Conservatory* hangs at the entrance to the final phase of Manet's career, a period of roughly five years during which his painting became lighter and even sketchier. Beginning as a kind of protective older-brother figure to the Impressionists in the 1860s, Manet in the 1870s was more and more seduced by the open, lightly painted surfaces of their works. The Impressionists were the catalyst for Manet's ultimate rejection of the tight in favor of the loose. But, as has often been observed, for all the impact that Impressionism had on Manet, he was never really an Impressionist; at best he could be called an Impressionist in quotation marks. Many reasons have been suggested for Manet's ambivalent relation to Impressionism, and it is not strange that an artist in middle age would want to keep at least a certain distance between himself and the innovations of the younger generation. But the uses to which Manet put Impressionism reveal something very fundamental in his cast of mind. In his famous defense of Manet, Zola said, "Don't ask him for anything other than a fine literal translation. He doesn't know how to sing or philosophize. He knows how to paint and that's all." Despite the attempts in recent years to make of Manet a philosophic painter, Zola was surely right. Manet's strengths, whatever they may be, are based on an intuitive rather than an intellectual turn of mind.

On the face of it, Impressionism may appear to be a direct, intuitive kind of painting. But the very newness of Impressionism grew out of a dramatically original approach to nature—an approach that was based not on "mere" seeing but on what might be called a philosophy of seeing. It is this philosophic or quasi-scientific approach that cuts the sweetness of Impressionism and gives to the pictures their dramatic tension. Manet could never accept the kind of systematic, logically consistent approach to reality that Impressionism necessitated, and his forays into Impressionist territory have a random, idiosyncratic quality that really has nothing to do with Impressionism. Of course Manet cannot be called an academic Impressionist; he was far too intuitive a painter

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and far too insistent on maintaining traditional chiaroscuro and color combinations to fall into that trap. But lacking the faith in a new vision of the world that underlay true Impressionism, the light color and lively brushstrokes became, in Manet's hands, a series of empty gestures. Who can help liking the little picture of a single asparagus stalk that was sent to Charles Ephrussi after he paid more than the requested price for a painting of a bunch of asparagus? But this is an adorable *pièce d'occasion,* a trifle, not a painting of any consequence. Manet's smaller, late café scenes come to nothing but hustle and bustle; and the landscapes that Manet did in the last years of his life, when he was working against the agonizing difficulties brought on by advanced syphilis, recall the works of a second-rate American Impressionist like Childe Hassam more than anything from the brush of a great French artist.

The one bright spot in the final phase of the Manet retrospective is *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère,* Manet's very obvious attempt, knowing the end was near, to reclaim some of the largeness of purpose that had informed his earlier work. It is a touching painting, a return to the enigmatic, bored heroines of earlier years—a kind of *Olympia* redone after Impressionism. Like so many things in the Manet show, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* has achieved a kind of iconic status in the modern world. Indeed, few exhibitions contain so many pictures that we are accustomed to seeing in reproductions: from the standing figures of the 1860s through the portrait of Zola, *The Luncheon, The Railroad, Boating,* to the late portraits of women and the *Folies-Bergère,* Manet's pictures are overwhelmingly ***known.*** From an aesthetic point of view, this is neither here nor there. Anyone who loves paintings assumes that when confronted by such legendary images ***in the flesh*** the veneer of fame will drop off to reveal a living organism, full of subtleties, ambiguities, and hidden riches. But, at least for me, this never happens with Manet. The paintings remain famous icons—static images.

Manet's vision—his sense of himself in the world and his sense of the world around him—is most often said to be expressed through the fresh, flat, bright modernity of his surfaces. But when an artist so consistently takes as his subject the life of his time and is so clearly interested in showing us the mores of the world in which he lives it is impossible not to ask ourselves what exactly he has revealed about the life of his times. The vision of modern urban life as a rich spectacle all the more fascinating for its brutal contrasts and stark amorality and of the artist as a bemused but detached spectator to this spectacle are among the great ideas of modernity, ideas that originate in the time of Manet. These ideas find their classic statement in the writings of Baudelaire, but they are equally an element—albeit in sentimentalized form—in the more popular imagination, as is demonstrated by the outpouring of encyclopedic books about the various inhabitants and habitations of Paris that came out in the 1850s and 1860s. In her book *Manet and the Modern Tradition,* Anne Coffin Hanson reproduces two charming wood engravings of café scenes—one from *Les Rues de Paris* (1859), the other from *Le Nouveau Paris* (1860)—in tandem with two works by Manet that deal with identical subjects: an ink drawing of the interior of a café and the brightly brushed *Café-Concert* (1878).

Looking at these plates, I am first struck by the astonishing sameness of the scenes. The distracted turning of heads this way and that, the juxtaposition of seated and standing figures, the obliviousness of almost everyone in the café-concert scenes to the performer, a dim figure in the background: all this is revealed by both Manet and the illustrators of these picturesque guides to Parisian life. There is, of course, a difference in the facture of the images. The wood engravings, which seem to fade off at their curved edges, are vignettes—little peeks—and the consistent degree of finish in the faces, clothing, and furnishings gives the scenes a closed, comfortable quality. Both Manet's ink drawing and oil painting are blunter. There is an

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air of impatience, almost indifference, in the way Manet scrawls in a face. The scribbles of ink, the slaps of paint do suggest the pressure of the moment in a way that the wood engravings do not, and in this sense Manet may be a better reporter. But when, going back and forth between the engravings and the Manets, I ask myself what more Manet reveals about this world that he so aptly represents, I come to the uncomfortable conclusion that his view is no more or less penetrating than that of these admittedly rather brilliant illustrators.

We are not complete strangers to the world represented in such wood engravings or in Manet's pictures. The collapse of old social patterns in the face of industrialized civilization and the concomitant growth of new styles of urban life was a powerful force in Manet's time and is with us still, while the heightened sense of individual autonomy that was so crucial to the social and artistic life of the nineteenth century has only become more pronounced. Looking at the Manet retrospective, the Paris of a hundred years ago may seem rather like the New York of today. The city street remains a dazzling pageant of style and fashion, high and low, and the city dweller is still delirious, bored, enchanted, and intensely self-absorbed. Many of the artists of the nineteenth century took urban life as a subject but perhaps no artist treated so many aspects of the urban scene as did Manet. Manet succumbed utterly to the lure of urban life—and in that rests much of his persistent fascination. His great gift was his susceptibility. He felt the pulse of life; he was a divine reporter. But there was something about Manet's very openness to the drama of urban life that became, ultimately, a liability. From great artists who take as their subject the life around them we expect more than great reportage—we expect revelations. Not just the sensation of life as it is being lived, which is what we get from Manet, but some clue as to the secret shape, the underlying conditions of that life.

As I think about Manet's world several paintings by artists contemporary with him keep coming to mind: Courbet's *Young Women on the Banks of the Seine* (1856), Renoir's *The Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1881), and Seurat's *Invitation to the Sideshow* (1887-8). Perhaps none of these pictures gives us what Zola said Manet gave—the literal truth. The languorousness of the Courbet, the sweetness of the Renoir, and the eeriness of the Seurat are exaggerated, hyperbolic, and those who believe that the quintessential modern sensibility is an impassive one will prefer Manet—he does not exaggerate. But I cannot help but see in the heavy excess of Courbet a more revealing comment on nineteenth-century eroticism than in the flat expressionlessness of *Olympia*; the unabashed joy of Renoir's men and women is, for me, a more convincing picture of bourgeois experience than is to be found in the disjunctive, harried panoramas of Manet; and Seurat's performers fading like ghosts into the gas-lit gloom seem to me to reveal far more than Manet ever did about the exhilaration and oppression of life, work, and entertainment in the nineteenth-century metropolis.

By his own account, Manet was an artist whose great strength lay in direct perception. He frequently remarked on his inability to work without a model; it was as if he had no vision, no imagination, just an eye. In his art he took possession of the world, but he had no special view of it. He had no overriding vision that pushed him to transform the things he so deftly recorded. Coming out of the *haute bourgeoisie* which ruled France in the nineteenth century, Manet seems to have regarded everything around him with the detached, affable yet bored attitude of the perennial insider.

Manet saw the figures in the drama of nineteenth-century life as mute, passionless. He knew many famous people, but his portraits of Zola, Clemenceau, and Mallarmé give us not a hint of the energies, the fires that must have moved these men. Compared with Courbet's *Proudhon and his Children* (1865), into which is compressed all the ponderous idealism of the nineteenth-century socialist, Manet's portraits are one-dimensional cartoons. And his portraits of

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women—which fill galleries at the Metropolitan and are supposed to be one of the glories of his art—are equally flat. A portrait is always a judgment, an assessment. Think of Ingres's *Portrait of the Princesse de Broglie* (1853), which compresses many of the insights of Proust into a gaze, or of Renoir's portrait of *Tilla Durieux* (1914), which suggests the experience of a life in the theater through a subtle smile. Manet's portraits never take us behind the facade.

Despite Manet's brilliance as a draftsman and the speed and flash of his brushwork, his depictions of the human figure are oddly conventional. The relations of the parts of the face to one another are always very regular. Though Ingres and Courbet tend to give us the human face in far more detail, the transformation of contours into slow, languid curves in Ingres's great portraits and Courbet's odd twistings of features to create disquieting effects suggest a far more dramatic tampering with reality in the service of truth than does anything in Manet. The regularity of the faces in Manet's paintings is part of what gives the Manets their naturalness—these do not look like an artist's view of people, but like people pure and simple.

I think Manet is a more intriguing figure painter when he takes a distant view of people and regards them not as models to be dissected with his brush but as small actors in a large drama. There is a fey, almost whimsical side to Manet's art, a side that is not very well represented in this retrospective—really by only one painting, *The Bullfight* of 1865-6. In *The Bullfight* Manet's draftsmanship becomes relaxed, almost childish, and he reveals the spectacle of the bullring with an ease that suggests not just what is happening but also some of the poetic lyricism of the spectacle that must have drawn him to it in the first place. The somewhat stiff *Music in the Tuileries* is surely the progenitor of this panoramic style in Manet's work; some of Goya's works are important ancestors. Though I have not seen it in person, Manet's masterpiece in this genre may well be *The World's Fair of 1867*, a large horizontal painting that lays out the fair as a delightful spectacle through which parade a whole cast of characters—a gardener, a boy and a dog, horseback riders, soldiers, and so on. Here Manet is not assessing people with the sharp-eyed gaze of the urbanite; he is showing affection. This same quality appears in *The Spanish Ballet* (1862) and in some of the pictures of races and crowded beaches. He achieves a poetic distance. The figures, dashed off like those in Oriental landscapes, suggest a view of man as a small, ant-like, yet somehow contented creature who makes his meandering way through the big, modern world. They foreshadow—not in form, perhaps, but in spirit—some of the little figures in Seurat, Van Gogh, and Bonnard.

In 1932 Paris witnessed a great exhibition to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Manet's death. In the pages of *Cahiers d'art,* the essential journal of the French avant-garde, among reports of new work by Picasso, Braque, Masson, Giacometti, and Man Ray and articles on Dada, Neoplasticism, African, and Early Irish art, Christian Zervos, the editor, published a vehement attack on Manet. I do not know to what degree Zervos's views reflect those of the circles in which he moved—certainly Picasso had already made his admiration for Manet clear—but I think that his attack on Manet, coming as it did from the very heartland of the modern movement, has a special interest.

Most authors who have written about the relations of Baudelaire and Manet have wondered how sympathetically Baudelaire, who held imagination and the ability to work from the imagination above all other skills, could have regarded the work of his friend Manet, who worked from perception and often said he had no imagination. In an interesting essay, "Baudelaire and Manet: A Re-appraisal," Lois Boe Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop conclude that Baudelaire was powerfully drawn to the great immediacy of Manet's art despite an underlying sense that it could never completely fulfill his own vision of art. In "A Propos de Manet" Zervos launches an attack on Manet that really takes

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its inspiration from Baudelairean aesthetics.

> The essential thing in art, like the most beautiful in life, isn't at all to submit passively to the influences of others, it's to master things around us and impose upon them the imprint of our dream.
>
> The disenchanted and dry observation of the world which constantly casts gloom over Manet's work comes to him from his lack of imagination . . . . Precisely his exclusive attachment to technique makes us see more clearly his want of imagination. When a painter takes pleasure exclusively in technique we are apt to inquire the reasons for such a tenacious predilection. This passion, which we wouldn't know how to deny in Manet, we'd like to know if this is really the natural state of the painter. I believe it, to the contrary, sadly acquired. For what purpose? Wouldn't it presuppose a drama in which Manet, aware that he derived little from nature and lacked salient originality, took refuge in technique?

Amidst all the publicity of this centenary year, Zervos's essay deserves rereading. He understood that in Manet's art the inventiveness of the technique masks the absence of a deeper kind of invention.

Manet's dazzling surfaces may be, in 1983, his greatest asset. Word has it that the New York art world is now weary of formalism and asceticism. Brash brushwork, bright colors, and scenes of modern life are back in favor. This makes it a good time for Manet; he is, in some sense, of the moment—relevant. And in place of the old image of Manet as an intellectual and a formalist we will now have a café-society Manet, dashing off paintings in his spare moments.

Manet worked hard to earn his place in the art history of the nineteenth century, and it is assured. But his art never achieves the depth of a great synthetic vision. Manet is no genius. Compared to the completeness, the fullness of the worlds we are offered in the art of Courbet and Corot, of Van Gogh and Cézanne, Manet's pictures immediately pale. Far more than Courbet or Van Gogh or Cézanne, Manet felt the urgency of the moment, the pulse of the time. But Manet remained a captive of time—so much a part of what was going on around him that he could not make of it something completely his own. Greatness is too rare for its absence to necessitate explanation, but it is hard not to feel that in the end Manet's transcendent urbanity was his undoing.

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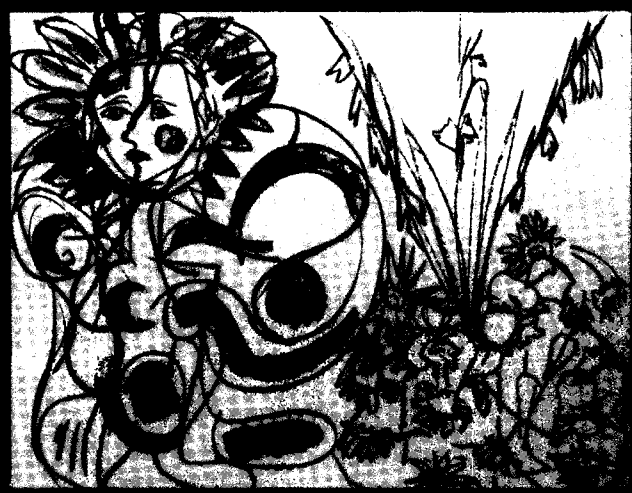

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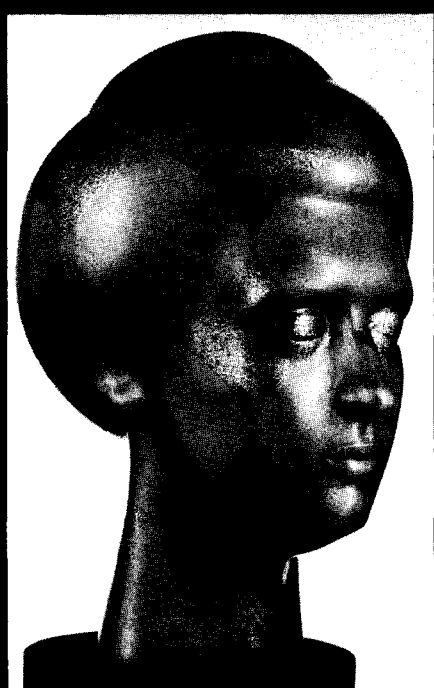

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Theater

'morning, Marsha

by Mimi Kramer

The intellectual blockbuster of the 1983 Broadway season has been Marsha Norman's *'night, Mother* at the John Golden Theatre on Forty-fifth Street. To stand outside the Golden Theatre around nine-thirty in the evening was an education in itself. Young and old, chic and dowdy: they emerged slowly, too moved to speak. Elegantly bepearled matrons fished blindly in their purses for a handkerchief; red-eyed stockbrokers, visibly shaken, went pensively off to hail a cab; ruthlessly tailored women clutching huge wads of Kleenex were guided to their limousines by sympathetic hands. Seldom had so many, so well dressed, appeared so moved. The gutters of Forty-fifth Street ran with mascara and even the embroidered polo-ponies and alligators seemed to weep for Jessie Cates, whose life had been so empty, so trapped in hopeless disappointment, that her only desire had been to pass mildly away, affording the least possible pain and inconvenience to those she'd loved and those to whom she'd meant so little.

Marsha Norman's smash-hit tragedy posed a problem for this year's serious theatergoer. Let's face it: it sounded like a downer. Unfortunately, it also sounded like one of those must-see cultural events. In addition to a Pulitzer, *'night, Mother* had won the acclaim of some of Broadway's severest critics who spoke of the play with the excitement and respect they generally save for only the most momentous theatrical achievement. Not only Mel Gussow and Jack Kroll, but even John Simon and Robert Brustein made *'night, Mother* sound like another *Long Day's Journey* and seemed to be hailing Marsha Norman as our next great-American-playwright.

Honesty and subtle craftsmanship were the critics' rallying points. In *Newsweek,* Jack Kroll wrote that *'night, Mother* "detonates with startling quietness, showering us with truth, compassion and uncompromising honesty . . . ." Mel Gussow deemed the play "as artfully designed as a sonata, rising in each dramatic movement until it arrives at its inevitable destination, a conclusion that asserts one's right to control one's life even to the point of suicide . . . ."

True, we had been all through this one before with *Whose Life Is It, Anyway?* True, Tom Conti's virtuoso performance as a quadriplegic had led Broadway audiences to a conclusion "that asserts one's right to control one's life . . ." blah, blah, blah. But that had been euthanasia; *'night, Mother* went one better. Marsha Norman's heroine was not a basket-case: she simply did not choose to go on living anymore. Moreover, *'night, Mother* observed the classical unities of time, place, and off-stage violence. (The critics were keen to point this out.) *'night, Mother,* by all accounts, had beauty and poignance as well as power. In ninety minutes Jessie Cates would try to bring her aging mother to accept that hardest of all deaths, a child's suicide; in ninety minutes Thelma

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Cates would try to give her daughter a reason for living: that was the plot. Both women would fail; in ninety minutes mother and daughter would come to know each other a little better—only in time to say goodbye: that was where the poignance came in. But the beauty and power of *'night, Mother*—by all accounts its crowning achievement—was that Marsha Norman would succeed where Jessie Cates had failed; for in ninety minutes (the very same ninety minutes, mind you) Norman would bring us, the audience, to a sense of the tragic inevitability of the final off-stage gunshot. *'night, Mother* really sounded like the sort of play that Aristotle himself would have taken seriously.

If getting us to recognize tragic inevitability was the crowning achievement of *'night, Mother,* Marsha Norman hardly needed ninety minutes in order to effect it. The critics have not given Norman her due: she is a more succinct, a more efficient playwright than that. The inevitability of the final gunshot was apparent from the moment you walked into the theater, before you'd even figured out where to put your ticket stub. Heidi Landesman's stage set for *'night, Mother* was a parody of petit-bourgeois Americana: it unfolded away from you, like Priam's palace, in labyrinthine intricacies of awfulness. The more you looked, the more there was to see: more drab, depressing furniture, more wrought-iron kitsch, more pill bottles, more paint-by-number artwork, more yarn (skeins and skeins of it), more hearty afghans of the sort crocheted by color-blind people who know no other way of passing the time. More of a set-up than a set, the living room in Thelma Cates's house posited a premise from which there was only one conclusion; accordingly, as you entered the theater, you struck your brow in a sort of premature recognition: "Of course! Anyone who lived in a house like that would want to swing from the nearest rope!"

A large, wrought-iron clock hung conspicuously on the back wall of the set. This was the clock that had sent the critics into such raptures because it was set to accord with "real" time. Tick, tick, tick. Throughout the play you watched each of the people around you, one by one, notice the clock for the first time, start slightly, look down at his own watch, glance back at the clock on stage, prepare for some incoming thought that never came, and sink docilely back into the tedious action of the play. In each case the same little series of recognitions seemed to lead to the same abortive insight. For there *was* no insight to be gained, no function, no effect: the clock on the wall was simply another bit of business dressed up to look like literature.

Unity of time has very little meaning unless a play entails some movement, unless something is happening to you, the spectator, while something else is happening on stage. The "unity of time" element in *'night, Mother* was a complete fraud, a gimmick as pointless as the clock upon the wall. For since there was nothing happening on stage, nothing happening in our thoughts and feelings that had not already happened within the first moments of the play, Marsha Norman did not have a blessed thing to "unify." "The life you are about to see," the set announced, "is not a life worth living"; and, sure enough, the play proved that it wasn't. But to observe "unity of time" in a play where emotional time, dramatic time, and intellectual time all stand rooted to the spot is a feat of comparatively modest achievement. Unity of time? Aristotle would have been in stitches.

In the same spirit of inquiry Marsha Norman's play proceeded to unfold, and with the same subtlety as the stage set. With the opening lines from Jessie Cates's slow-witted mother, it became abundantly clear to us why the daughter wanted to do away with herself. One of them was going to have to go.

> Jessie, it's the last snowball, sugar. Put it on the list, O.K.? And we're out of Hershey bars, and where's that peanut brittle? I think maybe Dawson's been in it again. I ought to put a big mirror on the refrigerator door. That'll keep him out of my treats, won't it? You hear me,

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honey? I hate it when the coconut falls off. Why does the coconut fall off?

Why does the coconut fall off? Why indeed. The world and forgotten America may be full of women like Thelma Cates; she may be drawn with an accuracy that takes your breath away. But if you want to give an audience even a crack at sympathizing with a character who represents one of two opposing values in a two-character agonistic play, you do not give her an opening line like this. Moreover, if your play is about suicide and you want suicide to be seen as a complex issue, an issue worthy of debate, you do not bring on your second character chattering happily about "old towels" and "a rubber sheet or something."

"Don't go making a big mess, Jessie," Mama says. Mama wants a manicure; she has been waiting all week. Jessie is a good daughter, and she has it on the "schedule" of things to do before she pulls the trigger. But first she wants to find Daddy's gun. Mama, flipping through the *TV Guide,* thinks the gun is in the attic and is still anxious about the supply of snowballs in the house. But Jessie has ordered a whole case of cupcakes (so Mama shouldn't want for anything after she's gone). Mama wants her knitting basket and her glasses. Jessie hands them to her and even cleans Mama's glasses with Windex without being asked. Mama wants six inches of yarn measured out. Without missing a beat in their conversation, Jessie takes a ruler out of her apron pocket and measures out "six inches exactly." Not five, not seven: there is in Jessie Cates not a trace, not even a suspicion of hostility; that was really the point of this scene.

Throughout, Jessie carries out each small demand, takes care of each detail with helpful efficiency, and toward the querulous and empty-headed woman with whom she has been living for years she exhibits only the most even combination of patience, affection, and wry good humor. When Mama is good and ready, she finally realizes what Jessie has been saying. My God! a gun: what would you be wanting a thing like that for! "I'm going to kill myself, Mama," Jessie announces gently but firmly. "What's the matter with you?" Mama wants to know. "Not a thing. Feel fine," says Jessie, and adds, "Waited until I felt good enough, in fact." The message of the scene is clear: Jessie Cates is in complete control. If she commits suicide it will not be in a moment of depression or a fit of pique; it will not be because she secretly hates her mother or wants to manipulate those around her; it will not be because she has a self-destructive bent and wants to make them all sorry. Jessie Cates, this scene tells us, is not a woman with problems.

I looked for John Simon's "devastating psychological accuracy." As Mama set about probing the reasons for Jessie's decision to depart I waited to be showered with Jack Kroll's "truth, compassion and uncompromising honesty." I was ready to do a raindance. Instead of a faithful portrayal of complex human emotions I met only with contrivance. "Is it Ricky," Mama asks, "or Cecil or your fits or your hair is falling out or you drink too much coffee or you never leave the house or what?" Fortunately for us Mama has the tact of a Roman gladiator and with each subtle question we are brought a little closer to the whole picture of Jessie's life. In addition to Thelma Cates, Jessie has thirty pounds of excess flesh to contend with, no friends, no interests, no skills, and no job, a delinquent son, an estranged husband, and a case of epilepsy that no one ever bothered to tell her about. Tick, tick, tick went the clock upon the wall. By the time the big hand had rolled round to the six you wanted to leap into the aisle shouting: "Yes, your life is a burden. Not least of all to us. Now go away and shoot yourself!"

The plot of *'night Mother,* the dramatic situation it proposed, the effusions of the critics, all these seemed to promise at the very least a conflict, a good old-fashioned knock-down-drag-out struggle between the values of life and death. Jessie Cates wants to blow her brains out; presumably Mama will

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do anything to stop her. "You can't use my towels!" cries Mama. "They're my towels. I've had them a long time. I like my towels." And, echoing Lady Macbeth: "Not in my house!" Mama protests. No point trying to talk me out of it, says Jessie. So Mama tries a different tack. Jessie's birthday, she points out, is coming up. "Don't you want to know what we got you?" But Jessie can guess what they got her; evidently they get her the same thing every year. No, there is nothing to stay for.

> You're not going to kill yourself, Jessie. You're not even upset! [*Jessie smiles or laughs quietly, and Mama tries a different approach.*] People don't really kill themselves, Jessie. No, mam, doesn't make sense . . . .

Jessie Cates longs for darkness and quiet. What alternatives for suicide does Mama suggest? Close your eyes, stuff cotton in your ears, take a nap. Such is the quality of the case which Marsha Norman allows to be made against suicide.

Why doesn't Jessie get a job? Well, she's tried that. A telephone-sales job. It didn't seem to help. And once she tried working in the gift shop at the hospital, but "They said I made people real uncomfortable smiling at them the way I did," says Jessie ruefully. *'night, Mother* is the tragedy of a woman whose smile the world was not ready for. And Marsha Norman is the mistress of the tragic feint: anything to avoid a conflict, any sidestep, any contrivance. Tick, tick, tick. By the time that Mama had found her tongue and was ready to take even a rhetorical stance against Jessie—"How dare you think you can just leave whenever you want, like you're watching television here?"—the clock on the wall was heading for nine-thirty and it was time for the audience to go home:

> Who am I talking to? You're gone already, aren't you? I'm looking right through you! I can't stop you because you're already gone!

Why doesn't Jessie Cates ever read? Why doesn't she give her life some purpose? Why

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doesn't she put to use some of that infinite patience and resolve going to night school or working with handicapped children? Why doesn't she become a nun or an axe murderer? Why doesn't she devote her life to making those around her miserable or lose herself in a world of fantasy or learn to swat flies with a wet towel? Why doesn't she do any of the things that people do in *interesting* plays? The questions we had come to hear answered were never even asked; for the furnishings of Marsha Norman's play—like the furnishings for Thelma Cates's house—had been designed to make our acceptance of suicide a foregone conclusion.

"But you say *'night, Mother* made you cry," a friend challenged the other day. Sure it made me cry. A lot of things make me cry. *Bambi,* for instance. I cry when Bambi's mother dies and when Christopher Robin grows up and when Mary Poppins goes away. Leave-takings are sad; they don't define good tragedy, though. "Then what made you cry?" the friend persisted. Cheap sentimentality, cheap because it is unearned. Take Jessie's big monologue, the one beginning: "I am what became of your child. I found an old baby picture of me . . . ." The old baby-picture routine. I read it to my friend:

> That's who I started out and this is who is left. That's what this is about. It's somebody I lost, all right, it's my own self. Who I never was. Or who I tried to be and never got there. Somebody I waited for who never came. And never will. So, see, it doesn't much matter what else happens in the world or in this house, even. I'm what was worth waiting for and I didn't make it. Me . . . who might have made a difference to me . . . I'm not going to show up, so there's no reason to stay . . . .

There, you see? I said. You're all choked up already! And you didn't even see the play! Some lines simply are sad. "Stay with me a little longer. Just a few more years," says Mama, and the tears pour down my cheeks. It is a sad line. *Out of context* it is sad. And I submit that if one morning some old woman, a complete stranger, rang my doorbell pleading, "Stay with me a little longer," only through convulsive sobs would I be able to inform her that she'd got the wrong apartment.

Among the problems surrounding *'night, Mother,* one of the most puzzling is its initial premise. For a start, Marsha Norman's psychological portraiture of suicide as a rational act has about as much "honesty" and "accuracy" as a Hollywood deathbed. Frankly, I don't think that young women commit suicide out of ennui any more than they die mysteriously and beautifully with their lipstick on. In real life there are inconveniences and complications. In real life when women die young chemotherapy makes their hair fall out; similarly, in real life conflicting feelings and unguessed motivations rob our tragic acts of dignity and heroism.

But let us assume for the moment that what Marsha Norman has to say is true. It isn't, but that doesn't really matter. For even accepting her hypothesis that it would be possible for a perfectly clear-minded individual to choose to end a disappointing life in a rational, objective act, an act untinged by any of the feelings of anger and bitterness that have been known to accompany broken dreams and disappointments—why in God's name would anyone want to write a play about it?

From Ajax and Antigone to Willy Loman the landscape of tragedy is well peopled with characters who, for one reason or another, choose death over life, each of them having the power to engage us intellectually and emotionally because of some discrepancy between the way the character sees himself and the way he is presented to us by the playwright. This discrepancy is what we mean when we speak of "dramatic irony": that little bit more that the audience knows than the tragic hero—because the tragic hero cannot see himself or because the audience knows the story. In *'night, Mother* there is no such discrepancy. The way Jessie Cates sees things is the way things are, as much in terms of her motivations as in terms

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of her life: if Thelma Cates is ineffectual in every other respect, she manages at least to establish this.

Jessie wants to shoot herself in the head; but first she wants to show Mama how the washer works and how to order groceries. Mama thinks maybe Jessie's mad at her. But no. Mad?

> Not a bit [says Jessie]. I'm worried about you, but I'm going to do what I can before I go.

Jessie has nothing but concern for Mama. What about Ricky, the grown-up son who steals his mother's last few valuable possessions? Is Jessie perhaps trying to get back at Ricky by killing herself? This occurs to Mama. But no, Jessie accepts Ricky for what he is: "He's hurt me, I've hurt him. We're about even," she says. How about Cecil? She really loved Cecil. Is she angry at Cecil for leaving her; is she bitter that he took her for better or worse, in sickness and health, and then walked out on her when they found out she was epileptic? Hell no:

> He loved me, Mama. He just didn't know how things fall down around me like they do. I think he did the right thing. He gave himself another chance, that's all. But I did beg him to take me with him . . . . he couldn't and I understood that.

Why should Jessie understand? Why shouldn't she be "mad"? Mad at Mama, mad at Ricky, mad at Cecil, mad at the world? Life has handed her a bill of goods and those she loved have failed to make any difference. So why shouldn't she be bitter?

For one simple reason. If Jessie Cates showed any spark of real emotion, real rage, bitterness, or even sullen resentment, her suicide would lose its *rational* sanctity. It would become open to interpretation, open to question. And questions were the last thing Marsha Norman wanted to raise in *'night, Mother*. Marsha Norman did not want to explore the potential tragedy in Jessie Cates's character and situation. She wanted Jessie Cates to be right. Unfortunately, the tragic hero was not born to be

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omniscient; if he had been, he would have worn a different mask—that of the god. If Jessie Cates is right, then why have we all trouped out to the theater in our Wednesday best? Why do we even need to have Marsha Norman's little aperçu dramatized? For what finally is its substance, after all: that life without life is no life? Thanks, Marsha. Thanks a lot.

If *'night, Mother* posed a problem for this year's theatergoer, that problem and its solution were, I think, a part of the mechanism that made Marsha Norman's tragedy such a hit. For what *'night, Mother* offered to a Broadway audience in the figure of Jessie Cates was a tragic heroine to whom they could feel superior. You shared the final moments of a lonely and wasted life and when the final gunshot sounded you wept or you did not weep for Jessie Cates and left the theater thinking, "There but for the grace of God . . ." But by the time your tears had dried, by the time you had found a table at the Russian Tea Room you had dismissed her, because her memory had dwindled to a single silent certainty: "My house, God knows, does not look like that. My life is not so empty."

Marsha Norman made the medium of "tragedy" a marketable item by making yet another alternation in the tragic hero's costume. Until comparatively recently the figure who paced the tragic stage had been the great man, king or rebel, and his clothing was the concrete expression of the duties and responsibilities which the spectator could envy and be glad he did not have to shoulder. Arthur Miller divested the tragic hero of his ermine and cloth of gold and dressed him instead in the vernacular of middle-class ideals. (Though not the first to do so, he was the first to do it with any degree of success.) Marsha Norman has fashioned for the tragic hero still another set of clothes. But like a certain pretentious pair of swindlers who once arrived in a certain American town, Marsha Norman's sartorial innovations are problematical at best. For tragedy cannot exist apart abstract values. Consequently, Marsha Norman's tragic heroine, clad in anonymity, a persona that cannot be judged because it owes nothing to anyone or anything, can do little more than stand before us in naked wonder. And, in the immortal words of Frank Loesser, it's altogether too chilly a morn.

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Books

The other Mahler

by Samuel Lipman

Merely to list her legal names is to provide a choice glimpse of Germanic culture during the last century. Alma Maria Schindler Mahler Gropius Werfel was the daughter of Emil Schindler, a highly respected Viennese landscape painter and perhaps the most important Austrian visual artist of the nineteenth century. She was the wife of composer Gustav Mahler (1902-1911), architect Walter Gropius (1915-192?), and writer Franz Werfel (1929-1945). But the story doesn't stop there.

Her three husbands, famous though they were, hardly constitute all her romantic attachments. Before she married Mahler she was involved with painter Gustav Klimt and composer Alexander von Zemlinsky, the friend and only teacher of Arnold Schoenberg. During her marriage to Mahler, she underwent what were at least flirtations with composer Hans Pfitzner and pianist Ossip Gabrilowitsch. After Mahler's death, she took up with painter Oskar Kokoschka. In the 1930s, during her marriage to Werfel, she was a constant companion, both public and private, of Father Johannes Hollnsteiner, a priest widely rumored to be Viennas's next cardinal. And after Werfel's death, the press (at least that part of the press represented by Hollywood gossip columnist Hedda Hopper) was full of her close relationship—purely Platonic, she told the world—with conductor Bruno Walter.

All this tasty material is summed up in an anecdote from Karen Monson's new biography of the woman who is now simply known as Alma Mahler[1]:

> [Playwright Gerhart] Hauptmann had also been smitten by Alma, and in the presence of his wife he jovially commented that he would be her lover in their next life. To this, Mrs. Hauptmann answered caustically that, even then, he would have to wait his turn.

It must be added that Alma Mahler had male friends with whom no sexual tie was ever suggested, and they were no less famous than her lovers. They included Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and Gustave Charpentier, as well as Thomas Mann, his son Golo, Erich Maria Remarque, and Thornton Wilder.

In the eyes of her many admiring friends, and in her own eyes as well, Alma Mahler was a talented woman. Before she met Mahler—already music director of the Vienna Opera—she was a composition student of Zemlinsky's, and under his tutelage she wrote many songs, of which at least nine survive today in various states of availability. According to Bruno Walter's testimony, she was a sculptor too, although nothing of her work in the plastic arts seems to have remained. She had literary gifts also. In 1924, she edited a collection of Mahler's letters. In the late 1930s she wrote a book of

1 *Alma Mahler, Muse to Genius,* by Karen Monson; Houghton Mifflin, 348 pages, $18.95.

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memoirs of the composer, and in the 1950s she composed her own recollections.[2]

There were, of course, difficulties aplenty in Alma Mahler's encounter with the world of ideologies and nations. She was, after all, driven from her birthplace by Hitler in the 1930s and her final relocation in America from 1940 on was in some doubt for several years. But there were darker shadows in her personal life. She was pregnant a total of six times by four men: three times by Mahler, and once each by Kokoschka, Gropius, and Werfel. Only one conception progressed to adulthood. Her first child by Mahler died at the age of two. Her final pregnancy by him resulted in a miscarriage. Kokoschka's child she aborted. Her daughter with Gropius, the beautiful, charming, and talented Manon, died of polio in 1935 at the age of eighteen (Berg dedicated his violin concerto to her). And the child of her last pregnancy, in fact Werfel's although she was married to Gropius at the time, did not survive his first year. She was left with one daughter, Anna, with whom, after some difficulties, she eventually made peace. It was Anna, like her mother a sculptor, who made the death mask of Schoenberg in Los Angeles in 1951—yet another expression of the symbolic character of Alma Mahler's life.

In its other aspects, Alma Mahler's life was scarcely more happy. She was a woman prone to a kind of constant deracinatory self-examination. She was almost obsessively concerned with who she was, what she was doing, and what it all meant. The focus of her concerns was, not surprisingly, her lovers and her own creativity.

She covered all this at great length in her memoirs. Of her doubts regarding Mahler, even before their marriage, she wrote:

> . . . we had our first major conflict. I once wrote more briefly than usual, explaining that I still had to work on a composition, and Mahler was outraged. Nothing in the world was to mean more to me than writing to him; he considered the marriage [on more or less equal terms] of Robert and Clara Schumann "ridiculous," for instance. He sent me a long letter with the demand that I instantly give up my music and live for his alone . . . .
>
> I cried all night . . . [but he then] moderated his demands. In the afternoon he came himself, happy, confident, and so sweet that for the moment our skies were cloudless.
>
> They did not stay cloudless. I buried my dream, and perhaps it was better so; I have been privileged to see the realization of my creative talent, what there was of it, in greater brains than mine. And yet, somewhere in me a wound kept smarting . . . .

She had a certain pitiless knowledge about what she was after in her relations with men. Thus, just after Anna was born, she told Mahler that what she "really loved in a man was his achievement":

> "The greater the achievement, the more I must love him."
>
> "Sounds dangerous," said Mahler. "What if one should come along who tops me?"
>
> "I'd have to love him," I said.
>
> He smiled. "Well, so far I'm not worrying. I don't know of anyone who tops me . . . ."

2 The complex publishing history of all three works is a description in itself of the shifts in twentieth-century musical taste, politics, and social history to which Alma Mahler was a participating witness: Mahler's letters were published in Vienna in 1924 as *Briefe 1879-1911.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux published the American edition in 1979 under the title *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler,* edited by Knud Martner. Mahler's memoirs, *Erinnerungen und Briefe,* were published in Amsterdam in 1940 and in Vienna in 1946. Viking brought out *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters,* an abridged edition, in 1946, as did John Murray publishers in London. Murray published a revised and enlarged edition, with an introduction by Donald Mitchell, in 1968. Viking's second edition, with an additional note by Mitchell, appeared in 1969. In 1973, Murray brought out yet another edition, with new explanatory material by Mitchell and Knud Martner. Alma Mahler's memoirs, *Mein Leben,* were published in Frankfurt in 1960. Harcourt Brace earlier had brought out an abridged English version in 1958 and called it *And the Bridge Is Love.*

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But then, just a few lines below in her memoirs, the old wound aches again. Quoting from her diaries, she writes:

> I told Gustav how hurt I am by his utter disinterest in what goes on inside me. My knowledge of music, for instance, suits him only as long as I use it for him. He answered: "Is it my fault that your budding dreams have not come true? . . . Oh, to be so pitilessly stripped of everything! He lives his own life—and I must live it, too! I can't occupy myself exclusively with my children . . . .

Even while Mahler was alive, Alma was making preparations for a new life. After a trip to Paris in 1910, during which her already sickly husband conducted a performance of his Second Symphony (in the second movement of which the French composers Debussy, Dukas, and Pierné walked out), she went to a sanitarium to "do something for myself." She was characteristically frank about what that something amounted to:

> In the sanitarium I lived completely withdrawn, as always when I was alone somewhere . . . . The German doctor in charge of the place prescribed dancing! Well, it made more sense than the boiling baths. Feeling responsibility for me and worried about my despondency and loneliness, he introduced young men to me; one was an extraordinarily handsome German who would have been well cast as Walther von Stolzing in *Die Meistersinger*. We danced. Gliding slowly around the room with the youth, I heard that he was an architect and had studied with one of my father's well-known friends. We stopped dancing and talked, talked all the rest of the night, until the sun shone through the window . . . .
>
> Soon, there remained no doubt that young Walter Gropius was in love with me and expected me to love him in return . . . .

After Mahler's death, she quickly received and rejected a marriage offer from a famous physician who had been a friend both to her and to her husband at the end. She writes a farewell to him with her usual directness:

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> When it comes to living you're a miserable failure. At best, men like you are put between book covers, closed, pressed, and devoured in unrecognizable form by future generations. But such men never *live*.
>
> Today I know the eternal source of all strength. It is in nature, in the earth, in people who don't hesitate to cast away their existence for the sake of an idea. They are the ones who can *love*.
>
> I go on living with my face lifted high, with my feet on the ground—where they belong.

And she goes on immediately to describe her situation: "I had moved on by then, for roaming in souls had now become my delight. Unwittingly, while looking for greatness in men, I was facing life—tempting, seductive life."

This temptation and seduction came in the person of Oskar Kokoschka. Knowing his reputation as an artist, Alma Mahler was once again the master of the romantic situation:

> We got up. Suddenly, tempestuously, he swept me into his arms. To me it was a strange, almost shocking kind of embrace; I did not respond at all. And precisely that seemed to affect him.
>
> He stormed out. In a matter of hours I held the most beautiful love letter and proposal in my hands . . .
>
> I cannot describe my feelings. Was it a spell that he consciously cast over me? I had to see him again . . . .

But as talented as Kokoschka was, he was altogether too mercurial and even wild for her own vision of her future:

> Oskar Kokoschka had fulfilled my life and destroyed it at the same time. Where had I gone astray? I did not know. What should I have done about all of this man's "tomorrows," about all his "maybes," at a time when I would have liked to be cared for in my great weariness?

Enter Gropius—again:

> Walter Gropius . . . . My brief, earnest friendship of Tobelbad had been lost in the gray fog of time; but I had made no mistake about his talent. I sat down and wrote him a letter of congratulations. "I am seldom alone," I wrote, "too much among people. I long for a will that would wisely guide me away from what I've acquired, back to what is inborn. I know I could get there by myself, too, but I would so much like to thank someone for it!"

Gropius soon replied, and they met again. Despite some initial hesitation—after all, she had just been torridly involved with Kokoschka—he soon came around, and in a few months she was married to the man she found "still the perfect Walther von Stolzing, one of the most civilized men I knew, besides being one of the handsomest."

World War I was on, and Gropius had to go back to military service. The happy couple went to a military supplies store for his riding boots, but the strong smell of the leather "numbed" her senses and she ran outdoors. Once again the future beckoned:

> Then it happened that I saw a book peddler's cart, bought a magazine, and opened it to the poem "Man Aware" by Franz Werfel.

Still, she and Gropius were newlyweds, and now she was pregnant. In 1916, the beloved Manon was born, but Gropius could not forget Kokoschka. For Alma Mahler this jealousy was unforgivable, and she wanted out. Her own comment shows the woman's determination: "I had wanted to know what it means to have a child from a beautiful, beloved man. I had my wish now. My curiousity was at an end."

It was Werfel's turn. She found him to be a "stocky man with sensuous lips and large, beautiful blue eyes under a Goethean forehead." He responded to her offerings: "My love for his poems made him feel at home instantly." And he had all the talents, even a respect for (Alma Mahler's) history:

> He was eminently musical. He loved Mahler's music and said he had wanted to make my

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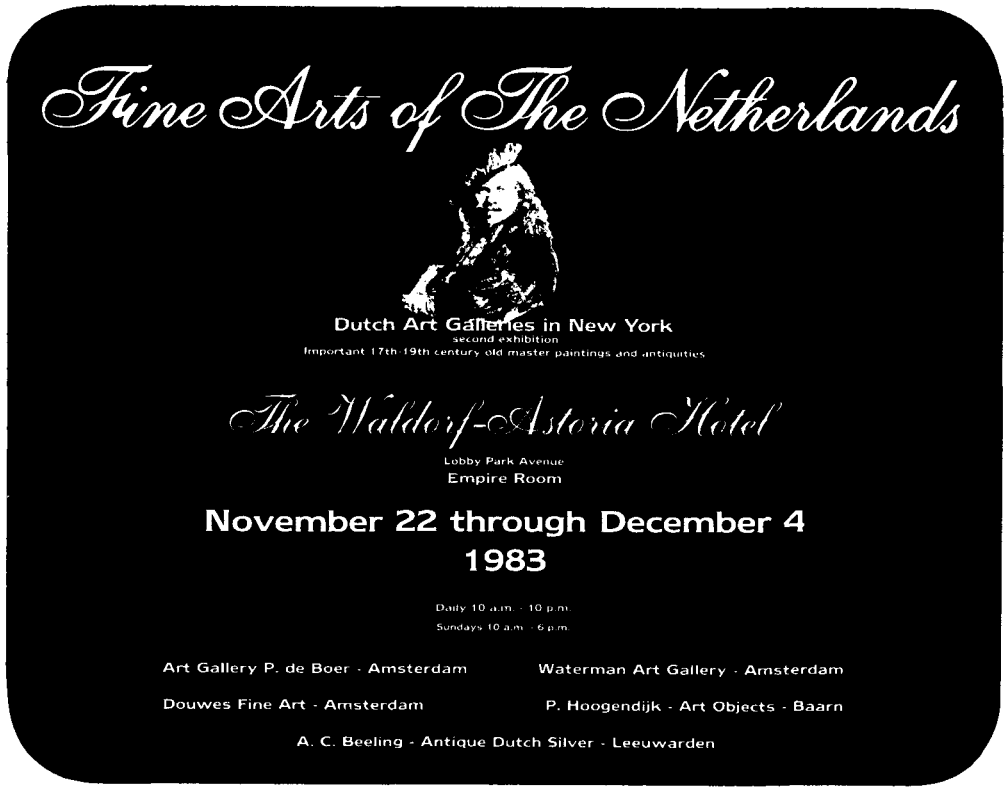
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acquaintance for that reason. He had a beautiful speaking voice and a fascinating gift of oratory. He was the most extraordinary reciter, lecturer, and storyteller on any subject, light or serious, and the store of charming anecdotes that he remembered or simply made up as he went along seemed inexhaustible. As by magic, his triumphant temperament animated and replenished his words. He never failed to cast a spell over his audience.

Even her duties of widowhood to Mahler seemed to pale under the influence of her liaison with Werfel. Though she worked to have Mahler's music performed, and though she traveled to the events she and Mahler's friends made possible, her heart wasn't in it:

> The only day I spent by myself in Amsterdam [at a 1920 Mahler Festival organized by conductor Willem Mengelberg] was May 18, the anniversary of Mahler's death. I went to the Rijksmuseum and saw the Rembrandts, the Vermeers, the Ruysdaels. I was glad, for once, to be alone, and yet I would have liked to discuss the pictures with someone. Why was I so alone? Had all of them withdrawn just to be tactful?
>
> I did not miss Mahler, and my attempts to put myself into a mournful mood failed miserably. I have no feeling for dates, so days of remembrance have no reality for me.
>
> I wrote in my diary:
>
> > It is only by myself or with Franz Werfel that I feel quite myself. With him, too, all reflections fall away. It was the same with Gustav Mahler; but he has been dead for almost ten years.
>
> I felt I no longer had the right to hold court as "the Widow Mahler." I was getting tired of it, too.
>
> In addition, I was not always in full accord with his music. It frequently seemed alien to me, insufficiently architectonic and often too long . . . .

After such clarity, one might be tempted to ask, what love—for anyone—can there be? By 1927, her quest for candor was turned on her relationship with Werfel. They went to see a bad play, and she wanted to leave.

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> Werfel had one of his tantrums and publicly insulted me in the street. I ran to a taxi while he spewed billingsgate after me: "Just remember I'm not coming home tonight! I'll fix you!" And so on.
>
> At home I fell on my bed, fully dressed, teeth chattering, and thought . . . and thought . . .
>
> Had I come thus far for this, that a man should treat me like common baggage? Had I surrendered my independence of judgment, my freedom of action? Did I have to stand for ranting and abuse? No—I was filled with tremendous protest against the sudden senselessness of my life, the perversion of my years to a level I had long passed. I was fed up with the slavery called "man". . .

Faced with a life this rich—and the foregoing quotations give only a small picture of more than a half century of cultural glitter and tumultuous emotion—a biographer would be hard put to produce an insignificant book. But Miss Monson has done it. Her work fails, it seems to me, on just about every count. It is not original; it is not complete; and it does not seriously consider the important questions raised by this extraordinary woman's life. In fact, it does not leave the reader with the impression that Alma Mahler meant much of anything at all.

To write a biography, it almost goes without saying, one must have sources. But Miss Monson doesn't seem to have many. No one who, as an adult, knew Alma Mahler when she was married to the composer is still alive; and hardly anyone is alive who knew her when she was with Kokoschka and Gropius. Only Anna Mahler could give Miss Monson significant testimony about what must be the most interesting years in her mother's life. The literature about Mahler, Kokoschka, Gropius—there is very little that has been written about Werfel—is perforce about the man and not the woman. What is in her diaries and the letters—there are no surviving letters *from* Alma Mahler to the men in question—seems to add little to the picture that has already emerged from Alma Mahler's memoirs.

Here, indeed, is a central problem of the Monson biography. She explicitly discounts the Alma Mahler literary corpus:

> Two of the books that appeared under Alma's name—*Mein Leben* and *And the Bridge is Love*—are purportedly autobiographies. There is no doubt that Alma did not write them herself, but there remains the question of how much work she actually did on either, or indeed how interested or aware of them she was in her later years. Her earliest book, *Gustav Mahler,* is, according to Anna, the best representation of her mother's attitudes. If one considers, however, that the volume was supposedly compiled at a time when Alma and Franz Werfel were moving into exile, one has to wonder how much Alma had to do with what finally appeared in print.

But whether she thinks more or less highly of Alma Mahler's various literary productions, Miss Monson manages to tell us next to nothing about their provenance or even about their publishing history.[3] At the same time she relies on them heavily for the substance of her narrative. Thus the reader is never told who, if not Alma Mahler, was responsible for the material, or what its errors are. For example, Miss Monson gives no information about the actual authorship of *And the Bridge is Love* other than that "E. B. Ashton prepared the book for publication in English." She does not seem to know that "E. B. Ashton" may well be a pseudonym. Of the origin of *Mein Leben,* the first version of *And the Bridge is Love,* one only learns that it "came closer to the truth, thanks to the sensitive editing of Willi Haas." But the reader finds out nothing about what was false in these books, or who was responsible, or what the significance of any falsehoods or inaccuracies might be.

It must be said too that there are some

3 For example, she fails to list any edition of Alma Mahler's *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters* later than the second American edition of 1969, despite the fact that the third English edition, in 1973, contained important added material and commentary.

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important gaps even in the material that is available. There is no mention, for example, of Anna Mahler's making the death mask of Schoenberg at the time of his passing in Los Angeles. There is no mention of the fact that the famous double performance at Alma Mahler's home in 1922 of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* was conducted first by the composer with the vocal part in German and then by French composer Darius Milhaud with the vocal part in French. Similarly, Miss Monson describes Alma Mahler's opposition to a performance by the BBC Orchestra, in 1961, of the Deryck Cooke reconstruction of Mahler's Tenth Symphony, but fails to mention that Alma Mahler was soon prevailed upon to reverse herself and allow performances to go on.

Despite its lack of striking new factual material and its lapses, Miss Monson's book might have made a contribution by providing a detailed analysis of just what made Alma Mahler tick. The first question to be examined—given Alma Mahler's lifelong sense of herself as a creative figure—is just how talented she was as an artist. But Miss Monson devotes little space to the songs as music. She properly finds them written in a "manner that frequently seems nervous and unsure of itself"; and she finds too that they show a greater affinity to the music of her teacher (and first real love) Zemlinsky than to that of Mahler. But before making this judgment, Miss Monson hedges by describing Mahler's reaction to his wife's work:

> What Gustav noticed in Alma's songs was a lovely combination of youthful talent and enthusiasm, more promise than achievement.

Surely more should be required from Miss Monson than this. She is unable to tell the reader when the songs were written, remarking only that "four carry dates indicating they were written in the years 1901 and 1911." Here too she casts doubt on the reliability of her material. She remarks that "There are no important differences in the styles of those allegedly written before her marriage [to Mahler] and those purported to have come a decade later." But she never describes the songs individually, and she doesn't give any of their titles, even in the case of the song sung in 1911 by Metropolitan Opera soprano Frances Alda as Mahler lay mortally ill. Again, Miss Monson fails to give any detailed information on the publishing history of the songs or on their present availability. Her "Select Bibliography" fails to mention that five songs have been reprinted (by Weinberger in London) as recently as 1972. Missing also is any reference to the one substantive discussion of Alma Mahler's songs in the English language literature, Warren Story Smith's brief article in a 1950 issue of *Chord and Discord.*

What about Alma Mahler's songs? There are no extant recordings of them, and the New York Public Library seems unable to locate their printed copies of the five (evidently not the songs printed by Universal in Vienna in 1924 and reprinted in 1972) they do hold. I have been able to inspect copies of four of her songs: *Die stille Stadt* (to a poem by Dehmel), *Laue Sommernacht* (to a poem by Falke), *Bei dir ist es traut* (to a poem by Rilke), and *Ich wandle unter Blumen* (to a poem by Heine). Overall, their style is not just related to Zemlinsky and through him to Brahms, as Miss Monson suggests. There is in them a feeling of Wagner's *Wesendonk Lieder,* tied as they are to the chromaticism and hothouse emotionalism of *Tristan und Isolde. Die stille Stadt* is the best of them, although it is certainly stiff and clumsy. *Laue Sommernacht* seems too short and thin for the pseudo-complicated and grandiose romantic idiom in which its melodic substance is couched. *Bei dir ist es traut* seems, in its lack of invention, artless. *Ich wandle unter Blumen,* barely fifteen bars long, manages to be utterly faceless musically even in the presence of Heine's remarkably suggestive words. There is, I might add, in these songs, very little feeling for a distinctive vocal line; all the action is in the piano part, with the voice merely serving as a kind of wayward *obbligato.* If these songs are representative of Alma Mahler's output, the verdict must be that she, like so many others of her time and

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class, wrote *Hausmusik*. If her *Hausmusik* was relatively better than that of others, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this was the result less of individual talent than of the brilliance of the musical and wider cultural milieu in which she moved.

To judge from the available literary material, it is clear that most of the time Alma Mahler had grave doubts about the value of her music *sub specie aeternitatis*. These doubts —despite her hope that things might be otherwise—inevitably shifted the focus of her life to the richly gifted men with whom she made her existence. This being the case, two questions arise: How did she win (and keep) these geniuses, and what was the function she served in their musical and psychological economies? There is much in Alma Mahler's writings and in Miss Monson's reworking of them that suggest some answers, but all too often Miss Monson's analytic contributions are on a very low level:

> A friend who loved her said that every young girl should have the chance to take lessons from Alma in the art of soothing the male ego. She knew how to make friends, lovers, and husbands feel important, as if they were the only ones in her life, as if they had forever to court her to prove their commitment and their worth.

Unfortunately, much of the evidence suggests that an iron fist lay within her velvet glove, and it was barely concealed. Her hold over her men came as much from her ability to torment them as to please them. Some men—Mahler and Werfel among them—were more susceptible to her manipulations and charms than others.[4] The greatest men she knew—Arnold Schoenberg and Thomas Mann—were evidently unsusceptible. It was the men of less strong inner psychological direction who were her meat. Alma Mahler was a beguiling monster, indeed a greater monster for being so beguiling.

Another question little addressed by Miss Monson is Alma Mahler's role in advancing her late husbands' posthumous reputations. There are many other widows of musicians, writers, and painters who have made various efforts to keep the flame; it would have been edifying to have had Miss Monson's opinion of just how Alma Mahler stacked up against —to mention only one name—the late Vera Stravinsky. By the time she died in 1964, Mahler was well on the way to his present status as the last universally appreciated twentieth-century composer, but his wife's efforts on his behalf pale beside the efforts of Mahler's disciples Willem Mengelberg and Bruno Walter. In the case of Werfel, her widowhood was hardly productive. She seemed quickly to lose interest in his work, devoting her energies to being the Widow Mahler (despite her earlier disinclinations) rather than the Widow Werfel. Werfel, of course, has had few, if any, disciples.

It is plain, I think, that in most ways Alma Mahler cannot seem a very enticing person. She was too ambitious, too self-regarding, and too calculating to appear truly lovable to very many people. And yet she was fascinating, perhaps more for what she lived with and through than for what she was in herself. She (or whoever) wrote a marvelous book of memoirs that remains, despite Miss Monson's attempt at a biography, the standard work on the subject. Alma Mahler tried very hard throughout her life to project an image of herself as Isolde, dying for love and for music. She didn't quite make it, because life is never quite an adequate copy of great art. And if she didn't get as far as Isolde, she certainly did reach the level of Tosca. This operatic heroine's famous words, *"Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore"* (I lived for art, I lived for love), apply well to Alma Mahler. But Isolde, after all, had her Wagner; perhaps Alma Mahler is still waiting for her Puccini.

4 Just how Alma Mahler treated her geniuses may be seen in Gottfried Reinhardt's story (in *Genius: A Memoir of Max Reinhardt*) of how Franz Werfel managed to finish writing the German version of *Jacobowsky and the Colonel* in 1943: "Alma . . . ordered Franz to closet himself in a shack on Malibu Beach and forbade him to leave it except with the finished play. In these disagreeable circumstances, he managed the chore in just six weeks."

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Two poets

Amy Clampitt The Kingfisher.
Knopf, 149 pages, $13.95
Frank Bidart The Sacrifice.
Random House, 63 pages, $10

reviewed by Robert Richman

A period of cultural transition is bound to produce artistic hybrids. For many artists and writers today, there is a special appeal in the kind of style that combines a renewed respect for tradition with a loyalty to the radical ideas of the last twenty years. Thus we find novelists using traditional forms of storytelling to celebrate the most marginal forms of human behavior, or painters "rediscovering" the figure for politically tendentious or absurdist purposes. There is even now a celebrated Broadway musical reaffirming the ideals of familial trust and loyalty—for a family, incidentally, headed by parents of the same sex.

Not all these efforts fail as art, of course, but there is a special difficulty for the artist who would attempt to "bridge the gap" and reconcile such contradictory impulses. The poetry of Amy Clampitt—whose first book of poems, *The Kingfisher,* was published recently to extraordinary acclaim—is a perfect example of what can happen when an artist is unequal to the task.

On first glance, *The Kingfisher* appears to be much at odds with the flat, ironical, formless poetry of recent years. It is intently serious and unabashedly "beautiful" and "poetic." What is more, its subject is nature itself, that hallowed ground of poetry's past. But ultimately Clampitt's poetry shows itself to be most at odds with itself, for Clampitt refuses to "merely" pursue beauty and refinement. Her poetry is laced with "concerned" allusions to the experience of war, the male dominance of culture, and the plight of the American Indian. And she is clearly worried about the "tyranny" of form in art as well as in life. Thus, she refuses to succumb to sentimentality toward her ostensible subject—nature—and by means of her social activism and a whole range of radical aesthetics she tries to avoid the complacency she thinks to be too much a part of the traditional pursuit of beauty.

The second poem in *The Kingfisher,* called "Fog," is characteristic of Clampitt's style and range of concerns.

> A vagueness comes over everything,
> as though proving color and contour
> alike dispensable: the lighthouse
> extinct, the islands' spruce-tips
> drunk up like milk in the
> universal emulsion; houses
> reverting into the lost
> and forgotten; granite
> subsumed, a rumor
> in a mumble of ocean.
>
> Tactile
> definition, however, has not been
> totally banished: hanging
> tassel by tassel, panicled
> foxtail and needlegrass,
> dropseed, furred hawkweed,
> and last season's rose hips
> are vested in silenced
> chimes of the finest,
> clearest sea crystal.
>
> Opacity
> opens up rooms, a showcase
> for the hueless moonflower
> corolla, as Georgia
> O'Keeffe might have seen it,
> of foghorns; the nodding
> campanula of bell buoys;
> the ticking, linear
> filigree of bird voices.

Compared to the extremes of subjectivity and introspection we have observed in recent American poetry, there does seem to be an attempt at serious objectivity here. And the poet's eye does seem to be focused on nature.

But is it? Clampitt looks to nature—but what does she see? She sees the fog's ability to shroud, obscure, and flatten things, which proves, as she says, that "color and contour" are "dispensable." She also sees the islands' "spruce-tips" (that is, nature's

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world of detail) "drunk up like milk in the/ universal emulsion," while "granite" is a "rumor/in a mumble of ocean." Clampitt seems to be suggesting that our traditional idea of beauty in nature is false, or at least that it does not constitute all that beauty can be. Instead of nature's variety and subtlety—its "color and contour"—we are offered the "hueless moonflower/corolla" which "Opacity" helps in becoming a "showcase." This same opacity, we are told, "opens up rooms," that is, enlarges the realm of possibility. In fact, this new idea of beauty supersedes our traditional one: "the lighthouse," says the poet, is now "extinct," and the fog taking its place provides us with a different form of light and intelligence by which we may see this world anew. (Notice in the poem how the only instance of the old way of seeing is done by someone else—Georgia O'Keeffe—off the page.) The outside world does, then, play an important part in Clampitt's verse. It supplies her with something that seems to be objective but that is really subjective.

Clampitt's ambivalence toward nature is reflected in the way the poem's lines so rarely leave a clear picture on the mind's eye. Her characteristic dependence on abstractions—"houses/reverting into the lost/and forgotten," "Opacity/opens up rooms," the "linear/filigree of bird voices"—makes this "natural" scene more dead than alive. So do the isolated nature-names in the middle stanza, unconnected as they are to any appropriate poetic image: foxtail, needlegrass, dropseed, hawkweed. Impatient with the sonorities we tend to associate with descriptions of the natural world, Clampitt throws in a few of her own, and they are anything but mellifluous: "universal emulsion," "a mumble of ocean," and the unrewardingly stiff "Tactile/definition, however, has not been/totally banished"—an obvious mimicry of Marianne Moore.

The poet's attenuated feeling toward history and culture in "Fog" pervades *The Kingfisher*. So does her distrust of "normal" ways of seeing: "the sheened no-color of it," "The light out there, gashed/by the surf's

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scimitar,/is blinding, a rebuke." And in another mimicry, this time an echo (laced with a bit of contemporary detail, of course) of Gerard Manley Hopkins, she tells how "chain-gang archangels that in their prismatic/frenzy fall, gall and gash the daylight." And there are descriptions aplenty that do not describe: "the bandings of platinum," "magnesium suffusing," "Clandestine rose and violet," "opaline nuance of milkweed," "underbrush of normality," "synchronies of fingertip," "orphanage of possibility," "embryon of compunction." More important, Clampitt's acoustical shifts have little or nothing to do with the scene the poet purports to describe:

> Out of churned aureoles
> this buttermilk, this
> herringbone of albatross,
> floss of mercury,
> déshabille of spun
> aluminum, furred with a velouté
> Of looking-glass . . .

The endless sentences, the straining for precious words, the artificial linguistic flourishes and the unintentionally surreal detail—all serve to lure our attention away from nature. If there is a connection between this poet and the external world, it must be a very aggrieved one.

Yet Amy Clampitt has been acclaimed as a nature poet all the same. Richard Tillinghast, writing in *The New York Times Book Review,* said that Amy Clampitt "immediately merits consideration as one of our most distinguished poets . . . . It is hard to think of any poet who has written as well about the natural world . . . [her] seashore poems . . . entwine the human life with the natural without suffocating nature." He went on to state: "But this is not to be thought of as 'nature poetry' if that term suggests the vague outlines, suffused with metaphysical half-ideas, of Wordsworth and the American Transcendentalists." And: the poet "invoke[s] a spectrum of previously unthought-of but apt associations beyond the scope of ordinary human imagination." Leaving aside Mr. Tillinghast's more obvious misjudgments, we need only note that "associations beyond the scope of ordinary human imagination" is not necessarily something the nature poet should be after. Wordsworth, Robert Frost, and John Clare achieved so much precisely because they knew they need not stray very far from what they plainly saw before them. It is Amy Clampitt, not Wordsworth, who brings "vague outlines" and "half-ideas" to her poetry, especially since half-ideas are what her poetry thrives on.

It is certainly not a criminal act to attempt to modify our perception of nature, and no one is asking that Clampitt be another Robert Frost. But her forced synthesis of nature and a radical poetic vision is really nothing more than a species of lame pluralism. This gives her work its strange nervous insistence and bizarre air of subterfuge. Although it is obviously very appealing to Richard Tillinghast and to the many other critics who have lavished Clampitt with such high praise, it can be infinitely more harmful to the art of poetry than a philistine poet's love of plain old nature.

"The War of Vaslav Nijinsky," the thirty-page poem that forms the centerpiece of Frank Bidart's latest collection of poems, is another hybrid work. Bidart, a confessional poet whose earlier subjects included amputees, sex-murderers, and anorexia-nervosa sufferers, has returned to the history and culture he previously shunned in an attempt to make more resonant, perhaps even add an element of tragic grandeur to, his very contemporary theme. Vaslav Nijinsky, who Bidart borrows for this purpose, was the brilliant and glamorous Russian ballet dancer whose collaborations with Stravinsky, Cocteau, and others in Paris before World War I are now part of modernism's legacy. But Nijinsky was also a figure of some sadness and despair. After he ended his homosexual affair with the avant-garde impresario Diaghilev he was fired (by Diaghilev) from the *Ballet Russes* and later declared insane. Nijinsky, in fact, is a figure so large, so significant, so rich in associations that to use him

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as the vehicle—or spokesman—for Bidart's ideas is more than just to bestow upon those ideas the respectful attention they deserve. It is more like attempting to wrest from the reader an almost religious devotion, for that is precisely the feeling Nijinsky inspires.

Bidart's poem consists almost entirely of a first-person confession by Nijinsky; it takes place after the break with Diaghilev, during the height of war in Europe. We are privy to the dancer's ideas and musings about, among other things, the second section of *The Rite of Spring,* called "The Sacrifice." Nijinsky's inner rantings are clearly schizophrenic. He imagines himself the sacrificial victim of the corrupt world that is putting itself through the bloodbath of World War I. The dance is an act of expiation. (The fact that *The Rite of Spring* was originally the conception of a perfectly sane Stravinsky is glossed over by Bidart.) *The Rite of Spring,* then, will be an ode to the planet's renewal after the war, which Nijinsky sees himself as having been chosen by God to enact. But Nijinsky's (and Stravinsky's) version will not be the traditional spring ode of birds, trees, and light. It will be the tumultuous, violent, modernist ode to spring, full of blood and death and suffering, for spring involves the death of the old as much as the birth of the new.

This reversal of the traditional view of spring prompts a whole series of corollary reversals in the mind of Nijinsky. These corollaries have little or no truth value. But because their case is made by the "visionary" Nijinsky, we are asked to suspend a good deal of our disbelief. (Bidart seems to believe that the schizophrenic mind, which "refuses" to speak in the language of rational men or make adequate connections between ideas, possesses an almost mystical power to enchant.) Among these reversals is the one for the idea of ballet. As Bidart writes in the dancer's voice, ballet changes from

> . . . the illusion
> of *Effortlessness,*
> *Ease, Smoothness, Equilibrium* . . .

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to modernism's taste for the primitive. There is also the reversal of the idea of marriage, which becomes for Nijinsky an evil compromise with a fallen world. He says,

> Diaghilev, almost alone
> in the Diaghilev Ballet, UNDERSTOOD;
>
> though he is not now, after my marriage
> and *"betrayal,"*
>
> INTERESTED in my choreographic ambitions...

Finally, there is the reversal of a whole cluster of ideas, thoughts, and feelings characteristic of civilized humanity: pity, remorse, ambition, guilt, jealousy, introspection, even truth. All are degraded features of a world that needs to be wiped clean. With all these reversals of perception, it is no wonder that "our" institutionalizing of the "insane" Nijinsky is represented in the poem as an example of "our" inability to share Nijinsky's privileged vision.

The opposition between this privileged view (in which Nijinsky's "Sacrifice" redeems the earth) and the degraded, human view (in which the *Rite* destroys the earth) is maintained to the end of the poem. On the last page we read:

> Frightened to eat with a new set of teeth;
> exhausted by the courage the insane have
> shown;
> uncertain whether to REDEEM or to DESTROY
> THE EARTH . . . .

To discover which perception wins out we turn to the last poem in *The Sacrifice.* It is a version of Genesis 1-2:4 modified to suit Bidart's purposes.

Not that any of this is easy for the reader to puzzle out. Bidart's version of Nijinsky's monologue conforms exactly to the definition of schizophrenia in Webster's Dictionary:

> a distortion of the usual logical relations between ideas . . . [a] separation between the intellect and the emotions . . . and a reduced tolerance for the strain of personal relations so the patient retreats from social intercourse into his own fantasy life . . . .

The result is painfully difficult to follow. In figuring it out we are supposed to feel privileged ourselves for being able to take part in the mysterious and esoteric. Nonetheless, we have the distinct impression that Bidart's monologue is too well conceived in its schizophrenic detail to convince us it is the speech of a madman or savior, or even of a sane Vaslav Nijinsky.

> Then, I said to myself:
>
> "HISTORY *IS* HUMAN NATURE—;
>
> TO SAY *I AM GUILTY*
>
> IS TO ACCEPT IMPLICATION
>
> IN THE HUMAN RACE . . ."
>
> —Now, for months and months,
> I have found
>
> *ANOTHER MAN* in me—;
>
> *HE* is *NOT* me—; I
>
> am afraid of him . . .

Bidart intersperses such passages with quotations from the memoirs of Romola Nijinsky (Nijinsky's wife), from Nijinsky's own autobiography, and from Richard Buckle's life of the dancer, all in an attempt to heighten the contrast between the voices of rationality and Nijinsky's "purer" speech. (Bidart's use of factual material from the real world is clearly inspired by his mentor Robert Lowell's use of his wife's letters.) But contrasts such as these weaken the poem's effect; they are forced or terribly facile, particularly when Bidart has Nijinsky conjure up metaphors for them.

> THE ROCK
> THAT GIVES SHADE TO ONE CREATURE,—

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FOR ANOTHER CREATURE

JUST BLOCKS THE SUN.

Which suggests another reversal, where the truest poetry is carved out of flat, banal, usually imageless chunks of prose.

> I know the psychology of lunatics;
> if you don't contradict them, they like you.
>
> *But I am not insane.*
>
> My brother was insane. He died
> in a lunatic asylum.

This being the radically new style of our savior, we should not complain. Just as we should not argue with the notion that an insane man can save the world. For we would be using the analytical tools of a deluded—or at least superannuated—civilization. How appealing, really, can such stale ideas be?

Even to the interested reader, alas, not very. But to Bidart such ideas are clearly held in high esteem. Of the five other poems in *The Sacrifice,* all but one are concerned with the saving properties of the most extreme forms of physical or mental grotesqueness, all written in Bidart's icily cool, thumpingly unattractive "non-poetic" verse.

Bidart started his career as a confessional poet going against the formalist grain of the Fifties, which, in his view, separated art from life. But how close to life does schizophrenia really bring us? And how close to Nijinsky do we get by concentrating on his breakdown instead of on his art? By borrowing Nijinsky to deal with his own obsession with human casualties, Bidart not only distorts a great artist's accomplishments but also undermines the very ideas the poet hopes to promote. Nijinsky is more than a sideshow freak, and confessional poetry has more useful tasks than to make him one.

Both Amy Clampitt and Frank Bidart have returned to traditional subject matter—in Clampitt's case, to nature, in Bidart's, to art history and culture. But this is a purely cosmetic feature of their poetry. At bottom both poets are quintessentially subjective in their transactions with the world. If they are unable to do what they are aiming to do, it is because they can't step out of their minds enough to see just how incongruous are the blends they have created.

A naked Wolfe

Thomas Wolfe The Autobiography of an American Novelist. Edited by Leslie Field. Harvard University Press, 152 pages, $15

reviewed by Bruce Bawer

In 1936, Thomas Wolfe published a small book called *The Story of a Novel,* in which he described the composition of his second novel, *Of Time and the River* (which had been published the year before), rhapsodized about the history and mystery of his creative gift, and, in general, sang himself. Two years later he returned to the same vineyard and emerged with a somewhat smaller pressing of the same vintage. He called this second exercise in self-celebration "Writing and Living," and—in what turned out to be his last public appearance—presented it as a lecture at Purdue University in the summer of 1938. More than two decades afterward, in 1962, professors William Braswell and Leslie Field of Purdue added an introduction, copious textual notes, and two extensive appendices and published the lecture as a book to which they gave the flat but accurate title *Thomas Wolfe's Purdue Speech: "Writing and Living."*

Now, the same Professor Field has brought these two small books together, omitted the scholarly apparatus, and formed yet another small book, to which he has given the catchy if rather misleading title *The Autobiography of an American Novelist.* Granted, these *are* works of personal reminiscence, and *The Story of a Novel*—by far the better known and more interesting of the two pieces—is in part an American success story in the manner of Moss Hart's *Act One* and Nor-

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man Podhoretz's *Making It.*[1] In classic small-town-boy-makes-good style, Wolfe describes the longing to create that came to him in his childhood among "the working class of people" in Asheville, North Carolina; he recalls the education in playwriting which he received from Professor George Pierce Baker at Harvard; he offers a diverting account of the writing, publication, and stunning suc-

1 Field is not the only critic to have mined Wolfe's minor writings recently. Richard S. Kennedy, the author or editor of several previous volumes on Wolfe, is the editor of *Beyond Love and Loyalty: The Letters of Thomas Wolfe and Elizabeth Nowell* (University of North Carolina Press, 164 pages, $18.95); Kennedy contributes a foreword to Suzanne Stutman's *My Other Loneliness: Letters of Thomas Wolfe and Aline Bernstein* (University of North Carolina Press, 390 pages, $30). The former book, composed mostly of routine exchanges between author and agent, does include three or four interesting letters in which Nowell offers suggestions for changes in Wolfe's stories; the book also includes the text of a rather Kafkaesque Wolfe story, "No More Rivers" (published for the first time), which profited greatly from Nowell's blue pencil. The latter book, originally a dissertation directed by Kennedy, presents us with the most unattractive Wolfe: Tom the lover, whose hostile, abusive letters to the woman he ostensibly loved betray a self-centered, insensitive young man full of guilt, resentment, and suspicion. Some of the letters are fascinating and revealing, and they make one appreciate Wolfe's ability, in his third novel, *The Web and the Rock* (which was, essentially, about his relationship with Bernstein in the late Twenties), to describe his own neuroses objectively. The book is far too long, however; a selection, rather than a complete correspondence, would have been desirable. The apparatus in both books is poor; the letters are not placed in context, as in Nowell's excellent *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe,* published in 1956 (before many of the letters in these two volumes were available for publication). Instead, the editors find it necessary to footnote the correspondents' passing references to Esperanto and the "Internationale." Stutman is particularly obtuse; her title for a chapter full of tense, argumentative letters between Wolfe and Bernstein is "Idyllic Years." She means it.

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cess of his first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel,* the massive, chaotic manuscript of which did not impress anyone overmuch till it reached the desk of Maxwell Perkins, who found it worthy, made order of it, and gave Wolfe a hand up to a seat at the table of the immortals.

But all of this personal history is merely prefatory. The emphasis in both pieces in *The Autobiography of an American Novelist* is not on Wolfe's life but on his art. *The Story of a Novel* may be cousin to *Making It* but it is brother to such essays as Orwell's (and Joan Didion's) "Why I Write," William Stafford's "A Way of Writing," and Jacques Barzun's "A Writer's Discipline." It is the kind of piece that all writers must at one time or another feel tempted to write: writers, after all, aim to make sense of a mystery, and the mystery with which they come into contact most often is the writing process. It is when Wolfe attempts to penetrate this mystery, in *The Story of a Novel,* that he becomes most Wolfean. Seeking the best way of telling us what it felt like to write *Of Time and the River,* for example, he jumps nervously from one excessive metaphor to another. He begins by observing that the book was conceived, like the universe, "in a whirling vortex and a creative chaos." But the cosmic image does not seem to satisfy him, and he switches to meteorology: the book, he writes, was "a huge black cloud" inside him, "loaded with a kind of hurricane violence that could not be held in check much longer"; when the cloud finally opened, the book "came in torrents." But this image doesn't seem to do it either, and Wolfe turns to geology (the book came "like burning lava from the crater of a volcano") and to diabolism (the book, like a demon, "took hold of me and possessed me") and then back to meteorology: "it was exactly as if this great big storm cloud I have spoken of had opened up and, 'mid flashes of lightning, was pouring from its depths a torrential and ungovernable flood."

And so forth *ad infinitum,* or at least so it seems when you read it for the first time. Wolfe's grandiloquent tone is terribly grating, his verbosity appalling, his self-fascination tiresome, his un-self-conscious Cecil B. DeMille-izing of his experiences with pencil and paper embarrassing. But his worst defect is his pride in his defects. He tries to sound modest, but is quite unconvincing. He confesses: "I don't know how to write a story yet. I don't know how to write a novel yet . . . . I am the last, the worst, the least prepared to tell anyone how to write a story in such a way that it will sell to anything, no matter what." Humble? No. Translation: I am not a commercial writer; I don't know any hack tricks; I am a true *artiste,* acting completely on instinct, personal vision, call it what you will; *je suis dans le vrai.* Like many an artist, Wolfe enjoys thinking of himself as a divinely inspired boob, a country boy touched by the hand of God. Such a self-image makes it possible for him to construe his faults as virtues. He wears his indiscriminate copiousness, for instance, like a badge of honor; he is constantly reminding us how many millions of words he poured out while composing *Of Time and the River,* and how many thousands of pages they filled. He is equally boastful about his inability to carve a novel out of this formless mound of manuscript, and about his reliance upon Maxwell Perkins in this regard. He writes that "When a man's work has poured from him for almost five years like burning lava from a volcano . . . it is very difficult suddenly to become coldly surgical, ruthlessly detached." Thus it is a very good thing for a man to have a Doctor Perkins to call in for major surgery: scene transplantation, chapter excision. Although Wolfe pretends to be admitting a lamentable deficiency on his part, it is precisely his incompetence as a word surgeon that, to his way of thinking, separates him from all the Grub Street types, whose slick prose does *not* rise like lava from the hot core of the soul. Thus Wolfe's inability to give focus, balance, and structure to his work is not, according to his philosophy, a failing at all, but rather a mark of his special genius.

Clearly, Wolfe's understanding of the writing process was severely flawed. Some-

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how he never grew beyond the happy fecundity of the clever adolescent. He was mesmerized by his power to create but did not realize that being a writer means being able not only to surrender to the Muse but, at the same time, to be victorious over her—to master her, and press her into the service of some governing design. Wolfe never learned that what you do after you finish writing is the most important part of writing. In his cavalier attitude toward the part of writing that takes place after the lava has settled, and in his religious devotion to the small voice of truth within him, Wolfe was of course most American—a descendant of Thoreau and Whitman, an ancestor of Kerouac and Ginsberg. And indeed, if there is any reason for critics to dwell excessively on Wolfe, it is that he was one of the most American of writers. He is more of an expansive and spontaneous celebrator than Whitman, more of a transcendentalist than Emerson, more of a fabulist than Washington Irving, more of a confessional poet than Lowell or Berryman or Plath, more a painter of grotesques than Sherwood Anderson or Frank Norris. Like Twain, Lewis, Dreiser, and Mencken, Wolfe is a self-proclaimed atheist, sinner, and exposer of Babbitts who is at heart a Puritan, a moralist, and a booster. Like William Carlos Williams he is fascinated by the characteristic rhythms of the American language; like Wallace Stevens he considers writing not a literary but a vital activity—to write is to give life, to edit is to kill.

In what was by far the most famous (or infamous) review to greet *The Story of a Novel* upon its appearance in 1936, Bernard DeVoto, writing in the *Saturday Review,* expressed his disgust at Wolfe's idiot-savant approach to writing. Regarding *Of Time and the River,* DeVoto wrote that "such organizing faculty and such critical intelligence as have been applied to the book have come not from inside the artist, not from the artist's feeling for form and esthetic integrity, but from the offices of Charles Scribner's Sons." Wolfe "has mastered neither the psychic material out of which a novel is made nor the technique of writing fiction." Although DeVoto was doing little more than reporting what Wolfe had written, many members of the literary community were outraged at his remarks. What is more, Wolfe was deeply hurt (though he did not admit it), and DeVoto's review planted in his psyche a seed of resentment toward Perkins that grew apace and led eventually to his departure from Scribner's.

One might suppose that Professor Field's *Autobiography of an American Novelist* is, at least in part, meant to combat the DeVotoism that has (as Wolfe might put it) taken hold of and possessed the critical establishment in the decades since Wolfe's death. Whatever efficacy the book might have had in this direction, however, has been entirely (and, I am sure, inadvertently) neutralized by Professor Field. For, rather than reprinting the competent version of *The Story of a Novel* published by Scribner's in 1936, which was the result of a major editing job by Wolfe's agent Elizabeth Nowell, Field has used instead Wolfe's twice-as-long, never-published-before, absolutely terrible original draft. In his preface Field mentions Nowell's editing, but makes it sound as if she thoughtlessly mutilated a masterpiece in order to get it published and collect her ten percent; the truth is that Nowell, a very fine and sensitive editor, improved greatly on a miserable mess. Her version is not, as Field describes it, an "incomplete form" of *The Story of a Novel,* but the authorized final draft. Her work, after all, was done under Wolfe's aegis; he looked her revision over before its book publication, restoring a few passages she had deleted but for the most part approving her cuts. She tossed out only chaff, never wheat; she gave Wolfe focus, balance, concision, authority; she straightened out Wolfe's often mangled syntax, corrected his grammar and diction, and made sense of aimless, unbelievably redundant paragraphs in which he circled around and around an idea without expressing it clearly and of pointless sentences which he had actually forgotten to complete. Her expert blue-penciling clothed Wolfe to his best

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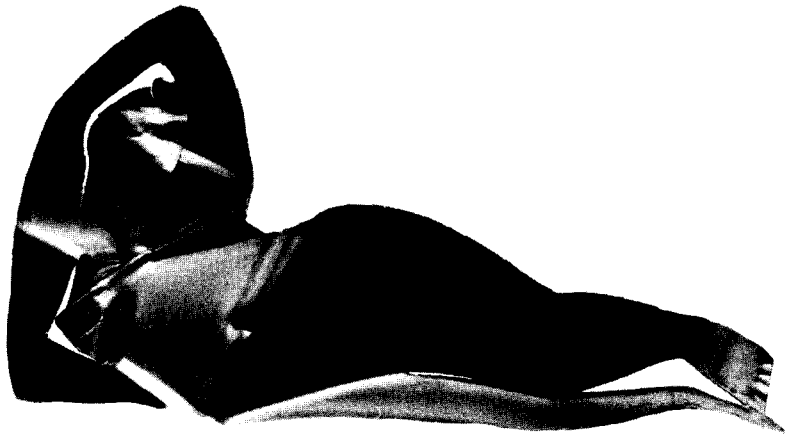

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advantage; Field, on the other hand, has chosen for some reason to show the public a completely naked Wolfe, with his defects mercilessly exposed. Here, for example, is a passage from the original draft—the "complete form"—of *The Story of a Novel,* in which Wolfe discusses the period following the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*:

> My name was known and I was being talked about. I would read about myself, for example, as one of the "younger American writers." I was the person who, some of the critics said, was to be watched. They were looking forward to my future book with interest and with a certain amount of apprehension. Here, too, my education as a writer was increasing all the time. Now, indeed, I could read about myself as a young American writer, and somehow the fact was more formidable than I had dreamed that it could be. I would read about my virtues and my defects as a writer and whether I showed promise of improving in the future or declining or whether I would ever produce another book . . . .

Very well. Point made. But Wolfe has only begun to make it. Later in the same paragraph he is still saying the same thing:

> Now I was a young American writer, discussed and talked about, and I would read about myself and hear doubts and hopes expressed about my second book and my future work and get letters and advice and criticism from friends and strangers, some of which asked me in a friendly way if I could go on, if I had shot my bolt or not, if I thought I had any more to write about, if I was done for, finished, emptied out, or if the seeds of life were in me, if the power was in me which could make me keep producing.

Eight synonymous expressions in one sentence: now the lava is really flowing. Wolfe goes on to a new paragraph but not a new idea:

> I was a young American writer, and they had hopes and fears about my future, and what would I do, or would it be anything, nothing,

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> much, or little? Would the faults which they had found in my work grow worse and would I conquer them? Was I another flash in the pan? Would I come through? What would happen to me?

Three paragraphs later—believe it or not—the song is still the same:

> I was a young American writer; my first book had done well. The critics had begun to ask questions about the second book, so now I had to think about the second one as well.

The passage in which these sentences occur illustrates an unpleasant Wolfean habit: when he was unable to figure out immediately what to say next, he did not, like any other writer, pause and think about it; instead he just kept moving his pencil along.

There are in the original draft of *The Story of a Novel* numerous passages of this sort. When one turns to Nowell's revision—from which all such redundant ramblings have been expertly expunged—one wonders why Professor Field chose to use the original text in his book. For *The Story of a Novel,* as he presents it, is no service to the reader, and certainly no service to Wolfe. It may be thought a service to the science of textual scholarship, but I'm not so sure about this either. To work out the precise original text of *Hamlet* is a worthy goal; for each word of that text is part of a brilliantly shaped work of art. However, Wolfe's originals—as Wolfe himself admitted—were unshaped rough drafts; not until his pages had been reworked by others (in consultation with him) was the vision truly achieved, the approved text established. It may, then, be of historical interest to establish a first-draft text of *The Story of a Novel,* but to accept it as the definitive text, and to package it in a slim attractive volume designed for the general reader, is absurd. By publishing this unpublishable rough version of *The Story of a Novel,* Professor Field is ignoring everything that is implicit in *The Story of a Novel.* He is doing something that Wolfe himself, who knew better, would never have done.

Do letters kill?

Hugh Kenner A Colder Eye: The Modern Irish Writers. Knopf, 301 pages, $16.95

reviewed by Tom Paulin

At present, many academics in the United States and Western Europe—Hugh Kenner among them—are greatly taken with the idea that speech is superior to writing. This fashion for orality appears to express a nostalgia for a form of populist primitivism. According to the classical scholar Eric Havelock, the oral culture of Ancient Greece was a "mnemonic world of imitation, aggregative, redundant, copious, traditionalist, warmly human, participatory." Orality is therefore one expression of those close kinship bonds that belong to the extended family. And when Jacques Derrida imagines "the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude," he is hungering for an intimate tribal and family world where the spoken word is your bond and there are no letters, no alienating signs.

As it happens, I belong to an East Indian extended family—my mother-in-law can neither read nor write and orality for her is a nuisance rather than a dream of plenitude. When she wants to send a letter she must either hire a scribe from the village or collar a member of the family who is literate. Although my skepticism about deconstructionist attitudes toward orality is artistic and professional, rather than simply personal, whenever I observe an academic attacking the written word I'm reminded of my mother-in-law, who would like to write us letters but can't. Illiteracy in a house without a phone makes for distance and—if Derrida's term has any meaning—*différance.*

The current fashion for speech really begins with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's essay "On the Origin of Language," which argues that language becomes less passionate as it grows more regular. It is not possible, Rousseau asserts, for a written language to retain its vitality for "as long as one that is

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only spoken." All that is needed to quickly make a language "cold and monotonous" is to establish academies among the people who speak it. For Rousseau, speech is much superior to the written word: letters kill, but speech giveth life.

Over the last two decades, Rousseau's romantic rejection of the formal and the institutional has infiltrated most academic institutions here and in Western Europe. Roland Barthes, for example, follows Rousseau when he argues in *Writing Degree Zero* that writing is a "blind alley" because society is a blind alley:

> The writers of today feel this; for them, the search for a non-style or an oral style, for a zero level or a spoken level of writing is, all things considered, the anticipation of a homogenous social state; most of them understand that there can be no universal language outside a concrete, and no longer mystical or merely nominal universality of society.

This rejection of writing and of society has been very influential. It is now possible to earn vast sums of money by writing books about the death of writing and the death of the author. In college textbooks such as Derrida's *Of Grammatology,* the printed word denies itself by aligning writing with institutional violence and elitism. Only speech is seen as a "presence" that is pure, primitive, bonding, and original. The people or "body" of a nation has sole authority over the spoken language and anyone who asserts the superiority of written language is attempting to dispossess and enslave them.

It must be obvious that many writers—Hardy, Yeats, Robert Frost, to name three random examples—draw on speech-rhythms with deliberate keenness and delight; by doing so they celebrate a marvelous marriage between the spoken and the written word. Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* is a printed text, but it is presented as an oral epic in two books: "Western Voices" and "Eastern Voices." Like Joyce and unlike many fashionable critics, Mailer does not write in a manner that assumes an antagonistic relationship between speech and writing. Instead, he savors the rhythms of the vernacular and springs some beautifully fresh words like "plink," "gunk," "tranked" on the reader. Mailer's language has a rich and fertile transparency and he lets it surge like a broad wave.

Although Hugh Kenner very briefly and mildly takes issue with Derrida and Barthes —he calls them "prophets of bare textuality"—*A Colder Eye* is heavily influenced by the current preference for orality. The epigraph to this study of modernist Irish writers (not "modern," as the subtitle says) states that "*homo sapiens* is a species which uses oral speech, manufactured by the mouth, to communicate. That is his definition. He is not, by definition, a writer or reader." This admonitory statement is taken from Havelock's *The Literate Revolution in Greece* and Kenner's study attempts to live up to it. The result is a work of oral criticism: something that looks very like a printed text but which sounds like someone talking.

For Kenner, Ireland is a paradise of speech, a land flowing with soft and honeyed words. He believes "that the mind of Ireland is held by the reality of talk," that the Irish regard writing and reading as "exceptional acts" (book-sale statistics prove them a nation of readers), and that the Irish are oral idealists for whom things exist only as speech. What Kenner terms "an Irish Fact" is the equivalent of a Berkeleyan stone—something that exists only in the mind of the beholder or on the tongue of the talker. The result of this conception of Paddy the Big Mouth is a critical prose which first wraps itself in a rebarbative stage-Irishness and then tries to insinuate that it is really ironizing its own loquacity:

> Though by no means pre-literate, in Ireland they remain on the whole unintimidated by literacy's pretensions, and notably by its pretense that it can attach impersonal value to getting things "right." Its *skills,* those are widely possessed, and deemed not without value; being forced to acquire them is what

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> put the fear of the Lord and the leather into many a rapscallion, and galoots you'd have said would not amount to anything can get money writing yarns to be read in America. But black and white is tricky stuff entirely, the lad who scribbled it not showing his face, you'd want your solicitor at your side before you'd be entangling yourself with it at all. What? Oh yes, as sure as I'm telling you.

This type of gabby prose is the speciality of a contemporary Irish writer, Benedict Kiely, whom Kenner praises in a footnote. It is a prose that exports Irishness to Britain and America, an essentially comic and servile style that reduces all Irish people to clowns falling about in the darling haze of barroom chat and overworked anecdote.

Paradoxically, Kenner appears to be dimly aware of the patronizing nature of his critical style and though he quotes examples of kitsch Irish prose from popular newspapers he is unable to shake off the contagion of their folksy begorras. In failing to do so, he runs counter to Yeats's magisterial statement of the purposes and intentions behind the Abbey Theatre:

> We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in the theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of the Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us.

Like Noah Webster in the *Dissertations,* Yeats is arguing for a form of deliberate and disciplined cultural separatism. He wants to create an Irish identity that is free, independent, and passionate, and that nourishes

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neither grievances nor a sense of inferiority. Like Joyce, Yeats aimed to affirm and establish "conscience" and although both writers have a central epic status within Irish culture it distorts their achievement if, like Kenner, we maroon them in a time-warp by isolating them from the state of Ireland now.

One measure of Ireland's cultural deprivation is the fact that no one has as yet compiled a dictionary of Irish English analogous to Webster's dictionary of American English, and this means that Joyce's special use of the word "conscience" as well as innumerable words in daily use have no institutional validity. Rousseau would have approved of the homeless orality that many words suffer in Ireland, but this homelessness is in fact a form of anarchy and fragmentation that appears powerless to heal itself. In present-day Ireland, the writer who advocates a classical and unified idea of Irish culture is likely to be derided as "romantic."

Although Kenner lacks a stringent sense of Irish English, he does devote some attention to the language and remarks shrewdly on the "exhaustion" that modernist writers perceived in standard English. He also offers a perceptive account of the influence of Sir Samuel Ferguson's fine poem "The Fairy Thorn" on Yeats's verse line. Yeats had no Irish but he had access to translations and to original lines like these:

> They're glancing through the glimmer of the quiet eve,
> Away in milky wavings of neck and ankle bare;
> The heavy-sliding stream in its sleepy song they leave,
> And the crags in the ghostly air.

Here, Ferguson weaves the subtle internal assonantal patterns characteristic of Irish poetry into a rhythm that Yeats and other readers found new and mysterious. And although Yeats's verse is conspicuous for a consonantal hardness (it is packed with bony "d" and "t" sounds), he did learn from Irish through Ferguson's translations and mediations. As Kenner demonstrates this and traces the over-Anglicized diction of Yeats's early verse, his blurred critical eye begins to sharpen, though it never achieves either a Yeatsian or a Barthesian chillness.

Unfortunately, *A Colder Eye* resembles the prolix offspring of an alliance between a tape recorder and a word processor. It has no structure and is gummed together by a series of corncob or shillelagh grunts and a series of trivial coincidences. Thus we learn that the 1916 Uprising was scheduled for Easter Sunday, "by coincidence Shakespeare's birthday and the tercentenary of his death." We are also informed that a week after Synge's death "Irish workers at Harland and Woolf's in Belfast put down the keel of the R.M.S. *Titanic*. On the night he died Lily Yeats saw a ship in a vision." In plotting these unilluminating coincidences, Kenner often resembles that fussy antiquarian John Aubrey, and his prose is twitchy with irrelevant detail and distractingly banal facts (for example, Joyce once watched the actress, May Whitty, who was later to play the old lady in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*).

Patrick Kavanagh—a poet who "grew an inch taller than Bloom"—remarked that Irishness is a form of "anti-art" and the work Kenner has produced is in effect a type of anti-criticism, a sentimental and blathery record of a literary revival that seems to groan under the weight of years of critical attention. At one point, Kenner remarks that Flann O'Brien was born in Tyrone, "a desperate bog indeed they'll tell you in Dublin, and a wonder it is he made anything of himself." In fact, Brian O'Nolan, the creator of Flann O'Brien, was born in Strabane, a Tyrone market town that is not conspicuous for its bogginess. Strabane is one of the most deprived parts of the north of Ireland and it is patronizing buffoonery to refer to it in the fake Irish lilt that Kenner affects. Sadly, I have to say that *A Colder Eye* is a bag of warm stale air that both diminishes its subject and reflects the crisis-ridden state of literary studies now. Kenner may waffle a lot, but he is not what we Irish term "great crack."

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Fiction chronicle

Will Raymond Carver please be quiet, please?

by Erich Eichman

The characters in *Cathedral,*[1] Raymond Carver's recent collection of stories, labor under many burdens: a watch is stolen, a refrigerator breaks, a drunk gets out of hand, a child dies. And when things go wrong, they go wrong in a big way. Some dark and awful force descends on these characters like doom. But the biggest burden of all is the one Carver has imposed. He's saddled them with his idea of a desperate lower-middle-class fate, gutted their sensibilities, and then flattened them out in a deadeningly sparse, stylized prose. They are so flat that they are like morbid caricatures. Their tragedies can inspire an easy kind of pathos without our ever having to take them seriously. (After all, Carver doesn't seem to.) Carver is famous for his terse and gritty realism—his stories leave Irving Howe "with tremors that resemble the start of a breakdown"—but in *Cathedral* the "realism" looks like nothing so much as a condescending pose.

One of Carver's favorite voices is the monotone, and it is much in evidence in *Cathedral.* I suppose that in a crude way it is meant to drive home for us the unhappiness everyone seems to be feeling in his stories, but it often has the opposite effect. It is so overdone it is stagy. Here, for instance, is a pair breaking up in a story called "Chef's House":

> I had to say goodbye to my friend. My friend said, You're making a mistake. I said, I have to do it for Wes's sake. He's trying to stay sober. You remember what that's like. I remember, my friend said, but I don't want you to go. I said, I'll go for the summer. Then I'll see. I'll come back, I said. He said, What about me? What about *my* sake? Don't come back, he said.

Anything so stylized is bound to call attention to itself before it drives home anything. By insisting that you notice its "effect," a passage like this subverts what it ought to be reinforcing. In this case, the look-how-dispassionate-I-can-be-about-passion effect *makes* passionless what is not. (That is not a nice thing to do to characters whose unhappiness we are supposed to feel something about.) Later in the story, the narrator talks about her son this way:

> Bobby was in Washington working in the hay. After the haying season, he planned to work in the apples. He had a girl and was saving his money. I wrote letters and signed them, "Love always."

That last sentence is so preciously juxtaposed it almost sounds funny. And that is the problem with "Chef's House" and many other Carver stories, even when the monotone gives way to only a semi-flat vernacular. Experience is never really dramatized; it is only recounted, and by a mind so numb that

1 *Cathedral,* by Raymond Carver; Knopf, 228 pages, $13.95

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it cannot speak of serious things—like love—without sounding facetious. By the time "Wes" and the narrator in "Chef's House" fail at their summer rendezvous, it is hard not to feel that we have been had.

When the narrating mind in these stories isn't numb, it is ostentatiously "hick," which in Carver's world comes to the same thing. The collection's title story is a case in point. The narrator of "Cathedral" drinks and watches TV and says things like "Coming at you!" and "Do you want to hit the hay?" When a blind man, an old friend of his wife's, comes to visit, he resents his wife's enthusiasm like a jealous four-year-old and wastes no time making cracks about the blind man (sometimes for their benefit, mostly for ours). "This blind man, feature this, he was wearing a full beard! A beard on a blind man! Too much, I say." And his eyes: "Creepy." He plays a joke on the blind man when they sit down to eat, ogles at his table manners, and suffers through the after-dinner small-talk by thinking snide, blind-baiting thoughts. Here he takes a moment to reflect on what he knows of the blind man's past:

> Pretty soon Beulah and the blind man had themselves a church wedding. It was a little wedding—who'd want to go to such a wedding in the first place? . . . They'd married, lived and worked together, slept together—had sex, sure—and then the blind man had to bury her. All this without his having ever seen what the goddamned woman looked like.

"It was beyond my understanding," he says. Well, isn't everything!

It's not a very subtle portrait, but then it probably isn't meant to be. *That's the way those people think,* Carver seems to be saying. No wonder sad things happen to them! (No wonder, in this case, this man and his wife are not getting along.) But as a portrait, it doesn't work. For one thing, it does no justice to people who drink and watch TV; Carver is too ready to match crude mean-spiritedness to "low-American" tastes. For another, it is grounded in condescension. Carver is coy about these people: the narrator's Middle Americanism is too ostentatiously silly, his thoughts are too adolescently cruel. Even the blind man is made to earn ridicule: he says "Bub" at the end of every third sentence and it *is* laughable. It's as if Carver is winking at us behind his characters' backs, pushing them into caricature and parody while they continue to play out their dreary dramas in tacky living rooms. Either way he has them "down there," presumably where he wants them.

After Carver has forced us into a feeling of easy moral superiority, he trades on it by ending "Cathedral" with one of those artificially poetic moments that depend on our believing characters in a story to be so fundamentally different from us—in this case, so desperately unenlightened—that they are in need of epiphanies and capable of them. The epiphany here is an actual laying on of hands. The blind man and the narrator draw, together—hand guiding hand guiding pencil—a cathedral. (It was Kenneth Clark—on television—who suggested the subject.) The blind man says to the narrator: "Take a look. What do you think?"

> But I had my eyes closed. I thought I'd keep them that way for a little longer. *I thought it was something I ought to do.*
>
> "Well?" he said. "Are you looking?"
>
> My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything.
>
> "It's really something," I said.

The italics are mine, but the condescension and sentimentality are all Carver's, and this is not the only story in which they show up. They appear, accompanied by the same trailer-park mentality (or a literary man's idea of one), in "Vitamins" and "Bridle" and most unredeemably in "Feathers," a sort of companion piece to "Cathedral" but without the epiphany. In this story, the television is tuned to stock-car racing, which in Carver's world should prepare us for what sits on top of the TV: a cast of disfigured teeth. Fran and her husband are visiting Bud and

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Olla, whose (former) teeth these are. "I keep them around to remind me how much I owe Bud," she explains. (He paid for the orthodontia.)

There might be something simple and poignant in this—and something poignantly grotesque—but Carver cannot hold back the bitter facetiousness these people seem to inspire in him. He lets the teeth be handed around and flatly described in disgusting detail by yet another heartless narrator (Fran's husband), and then keeps returning to them as they rest on Olla's lap for the rest of the scene. Thus, he can have his joke—just look at these people!—and dish a crude working-class mentality at the same time.

Carver isn't finished, however. When Olla brings out her baby, we are offered a truly coarse display:

> Bar none, it was the ugliest baby I'd ever seen . . . . It had a big red face, pop eyes, a broad forehead, and these big fat lips. It had no neck to speak of, and it had three or four fat chins. Its chins rolled right up under its ear, and its ears stuck out from its bald head. Fat hung over its wrists. Its arms and fingers were fat. Even calling it ugly does it credit.

Pretty crude stuff, right? Well, yes and no. It turns out that the baby is indeed ugly: *the parents admit it.* Once again, Carver has it both ways—straight and mocking—and the people whose horrible lives he's chronicling end up looking like shabby cartoons. The narrator's late-arrived-at insight—"It *was* an ugly baby. But, for all I know, I guess it didn't matter that much to Bud and Olla."—is condescendingly slight: a cartoon-insight. (You know, the kind *those* people have.) Fate goes on to crush Fran and her husband in this story—desperate unhappiness for the rest of their lives, etc.—but it is hard not to feel that they deserve it.

Carver's predilections can spoil even the better stories in *Cathedral.* "A Small, Good Thing," for example, begins with an accident that feels like the Real (Awful) Thing: on his birthday, a young boy is hit by a car and hovers near death. For once Carver's dry style works: there is real crisis here—prose shorthand makes sense—and the parents we worry with are something more than joke-ciphers. Unfortunately, a baker, working-class slug that he is, keeps calling up (about a birthday cake) and when the parents finally confront him, after the boy has died, he uses the opportunity for an orgy of self-abasement, even though (figure this one out) he knew nothing of the accident. Please forgive me, he says, "I'm a baker. I don't claim to be anything else. Maybe once, maybe years ago, I was a different kind of human being . . . . I'm not an evil man, I don't think." And so on.

There is one other story in the collection that deserved a better fate. It's called "Preservation" and it's the one where the refrigerator breaks. For the man-of-the-house, who's been lying on the sofa for three months, ever since he lost his job, a refrigerator on the fritz is The Last Straw. Surveying the putrifying meat and melted ice cream, he asks desperately, "Hey, what's going on?" and there is real pathos in it. He's not asking the refrigerator, or his wife, who is standing disapprovingly nearby, but the nameless forces that have unmanned him. Jobs "terminate," home appliances break; nothing goes as it should, especially in the part of life he's responsible for. When his wife suggests buying a refrigerator at an auction, he's threatened again. He's never been to one. *She* has, though; more than that, she used to go with her *father.*

Now this is in fact a kind of gritty realism. You can feel this man's impotence, you can see him feeling pushed against the wall, and you wonder which attack on his pride will make him do something. You wonder, too, what it is he'll do. But that's as far as Carver goes with the character or the theme. The wife gets all weepy over those auctions of yesteryear, and we hear about her father's tragic death (people are always dying offstage in Carver's stories). In the story's last image, we watch her staring in disbelief at her husband's bare feet on the kitchen floor. I don't know why she does, except that she

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sees him as pathetic, a privilege she hasn't earned.

This is cheap pathos indeed, but it is hardly surprising considering the disregard Carver shows for his characters throughout *Cathedral* and the disregard he seems to feel for the loftier aspects of his craft. When asked in a recent interview whether his writing would "change anybody," Carver replied:

> I really don't know. I doubt it. Not change in any profound sense. Maybe not any change at all. After all, art is a form of entertainment, yes? For both the maker and the consumer. I mean in a way it's like shooting billiards or playing cards, or bowling—it's just a different, and I would say higher, form of amusement . . . . Art is all the things art is supposed to be. But art is also a superior amusement. Am I wrong in thinking this?

I would say he is wrong in thinking this. But in the present case it's a moot point. *Cathedral* isn't art and it isn't very amusing either.

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Letters

Fairfield Porter

To the Editors:

In his letter to the editors about Fairfield Porter (September, 1983), Clement Greenberg denies that there was ever a meeting between himself and Porter at Willem de Kooning's studio, at which Greenberg told de Kooning "You can't paint figuratively today." There are several problems with his denial. Porter and de Kooning both remembered the incident: it is hard to imagine them both making it up. Also, Porter's account of the incident, which was by no means his only allusion to it, was published in 1972; it is strange that Greenberg, to whom the matter is not "trivial," should have waited eleven years, and until after Porter was dead, to make a public denial; and stranger still that, when doing so, he should have appended two paragraphs of slurs and totally unsubstantiated allegations, descending to gibberish and amounting to character assassination—the sort of thing that happens when dissenting intellectuals lose sight of the issues and let their writing degenerate into mere personal animosity.

But where Greenberg leaves himself most open of all is in the surprising sentence "You don't talk that way to art [sic] or to artists." This is disingenuous. Without even having to refer to Greenberg's widespread reputation for high-handedness in his dealings with artists—extending even to the physical alteration of their works after they are dead—his own published criticism is ample evidence that this is precisely the way he has talked, from the beginning. His first substantial essay, which offers "an explanation for the present superiority of abstract art" states that "a conjunction of historical circumstances . . . holds the artist in a vice from which at the present moment he can escape only by surrendering his ambition and returning to a stale past . . . ." In that past, no matter what the artists had wanted to do, "so inexorable was the logic of the development that in the end their work constituted but another step towards abstract art . . . . All roads led to the same place." Greenberg could hardly have made himself clearer. For the artist it is a Hobson's choice of a scenario; as an intellectual effort it is reminiscent of Herbert Spencer's theory of botany which he expounded to George Eliot one afternoon at Kew: if the plants didn't happen to fit the theory, she explained, "tant pis pour les plantes." Greenberg's criticism was, and was to remain, deterministic, authoritarian, and coercive: in other words, "you" *do* talk to artists "that way"!

In the essay which occasioned Greenberg's letter, "Fairfield Porter: An American Classic" (May, 1983), which warmly gives to Porter a distinguished place in American art, Hilton Kramer quotes Porter's reaction to Greenberg's remark at de Kooning's studio: "If that's what he says, I think I will do just exactly what he says I can't do. I might have become an abstract painter except for that." Kramer doubts that this should be taken at face value; maybe not, but I think it would be wrong to assume that it has *no* value. For Porter's reaction, even if it entailed only a tipping of the scales, or the confirmation of a decision already more or less made—as Ben Jonson

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said, "Art's hid causes are not found"—expresses something that is inherent in all his activities as an intellectual and an artist from quite early on; that is, a very strong assertion of the value and integrity of what is unique and unpredictable as opposed to what is systematic and controlled. It shows in his affiliation with an unconventional political party in the 1940s whose aim was to create a society in which there would be the least possible control over the population by a leader, an ideology, a bureaucracy, or any kind of ruling class; it shows in his idea of composition in painting which has to do, he thought, not with looking for likenesses and repetitions, but in making distinctions—an idea which shows itself most obviously in Porter's use of color, celebrating the variety of sensory experience. It shows in the lesson he felt he learned from de Kooning, that painting is a process of discovery, not the execution of a preconceived idea; it shows in his belief that the destructiveness of technology comes from the scientific method whose generalizations ignore the specific case, and in his interest in the theory of evolution described by J. Bronowski—"Evolution is an open and unbounded plan."

With such clearly marked tendencies of thought behind all his activities, Porter could hardly have felt anything but repugnance for the kind of criticism practiced by Greenberg, and he articulated this in several published rejoinders. His telling of his reaction to the incident in de Kooning's studio is a serious joke, both a taunting smack at a coercive theory of art and an expression of intensely held underlying convictions.

Rackstraw Downes
New York City

To the Editors:
Although I found Clement Greenberg's letter up to the standards of his brilliant prose, I was shocked by his contradictions of Fairfield's quotes. I must say that I found Fairfield Porter to be the most scrupulously honest intellectual that I have met. He not only remembered what he said, he remembered what everyone else said. He never appropriated a thought without putting it in quotes. His rigorousness in this area, I believe, was the backbone of his brilliant writing, and his painting.

Alex Katz
New York City

Flaubert

To the Editors:
May I comment on two statements by David Paul in his review of my two volumes of Gustave Flaubert's letters in translation? ("The Two Flauberts," September 1983.)

Mr. Paul says: "A pity that Mr. Steegmuller didn't include a reproduction of Courbet's magnificent portrait of Louise Colet en Amazone, instead of the two doll-like effigies he did include. Courbet gives us the real Louise . . . ."

It is many years since the Metropolitan Museum removed the name of Louise Colet from the label on the Courbet portrait to which Mr. Paul refers. In the words of the museum: "Identification cannot be substantiated." A scholar is obliged to rely on verified depictions, rather than conjectural ones.

Earlier in his article Mr. Paul says: "I fail to discern what Steegmuller calls, in his introduction to the second volume . . . 'the rich intellectual content of the later letters.'" I myself fail to discover in my introduction to the second volume these words which Mr. Paul quotes. Nevertheless, I suggest, to carry the matter no further, a reading of Flaubert's long letter to Sainte-Beuve on the subject of *Salammbô,* and of the letters to Taine—documents which, although not mentioned in Mr. Paul's article, in my view deserve their renown.

Francis Steegmuller
New York City

David Paul replies:
Mr. Steegmuller might have pointed out that his remark as to "the rich intellectual content of the later letters" is correctly quoted but occurs in his introduction to the *first* volume. My apologies for the numerical error.

As for the Courbet portrait, oral tradition can be strong where documents are lacking. At least

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Courbet's portrait looks like someone with character. Perhaps the "doll-like effigies" were made thus at Louise's insistence.

I had of course read the letters to Sainte-Beuve and Taine which Mr. Steegmuller adduces. I must ask him to forgive me for not sharing his assessment of these.

Malcolm Morley

To the Editors:

In your September issue Hilton Kramer wrote a piece titled "The Malcolm Morley Retrospective." Because the title of the piece is misinformed, I believe Mr. Kramer made a number of observations, particularly in the first three and the last paragraph(s) of the eleven he wrote, that describe the exhibition incorrectly.

Organized by Nicholas Serota, Director of the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, and currently touring America, the exhibition is a large selection of Malcolm Morley's paintings but is by no means a retrospective. Nor does it pretend to be. The title of the catalog accompanying the exhibition is *Malcolm Morley: Paintings* 1965-82. In his Foreword to the catalogue Nicholas Serota writes:

> Although Malcolm Morley is now fifty and has been painting for nearly thirty years this is not a retrospective exhibition of the kind conventionally given to painters in mid-career. We have chosen to show only the development of his painting from his emergence as a distinct figure within the community of painters, omitting the early landscapes and abstract paintings as well as the watercolors and drawings which have more recently become an important part of his work.

Later on in the Foreword Serota offers the raison d'être for the exhibition when he points out that "almost no one can have consistently followed his evolution," that his paintings are "now very widely dispersed," and that "At the most simple level the exhibition will therefore offer information and allow comparisons to be made."

Rather than being a retrospective, as Mr. Kramer would have his readers believe, this was Malcolm Morley's first major Museum exhibition. The paintings it includes are the ones that have exerted considerable influence in the New York art world. Certainly, the Proto-Photorealist work of the 60s and the so-called "Neo-Expressionist" work of the 70s and 80s have inspired legions of inept imitators. Morley's influence is enormous, comparable to de Kooning's and Johns's. I think that by misinforming his readers, Mr. Kramer has not only done Malcolm Morley a disservice but he has failed to see one of the reasons why the exhibition was organized in such a manner.

John Yau
New York City

Hilton Kramer replies:

In describing the Malcolm Morley exhibition as "not a retrospective exhibition of the kind conventionally given to painters in mid-career," Mr. Serota may have been begging a question or two, but he was not, I take it, suggesting that the show is no sort of retrospective at all. Call it a partial retrospective, a selective retrospective, or whatever you like—the public is certainly shown a consecutive but incomplete survey of the artist's oeuvre. This being the case, it seemed to me worth pointing out that the show *is* incomplete. John Yau really has something quite different on his mind. In comparing Morley's influence to that of de Kooning and Johns, he is clearly out to win some sort of world crown for the artist. Alas, my article was more modestly conceived, being concerned primarily with Morley's paintings.

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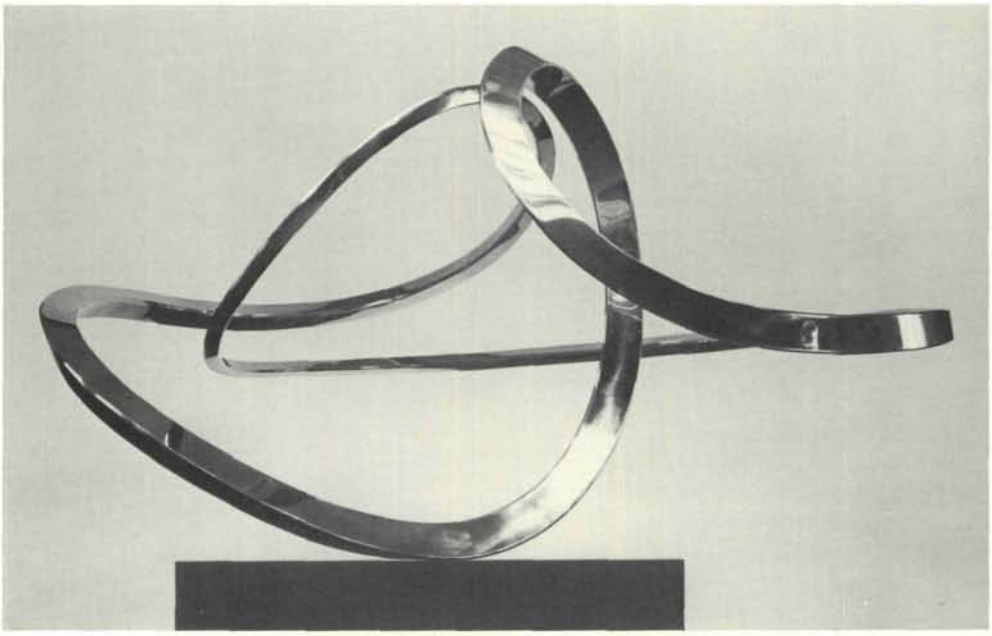

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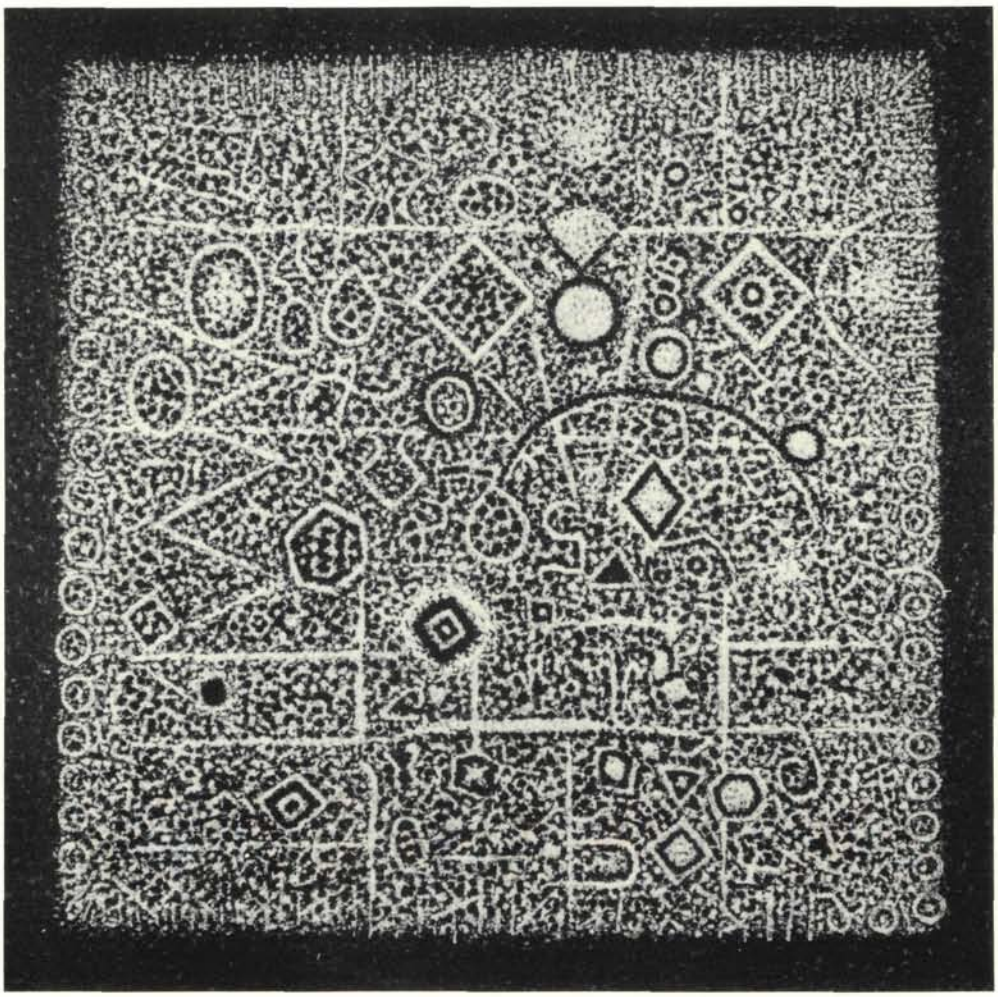

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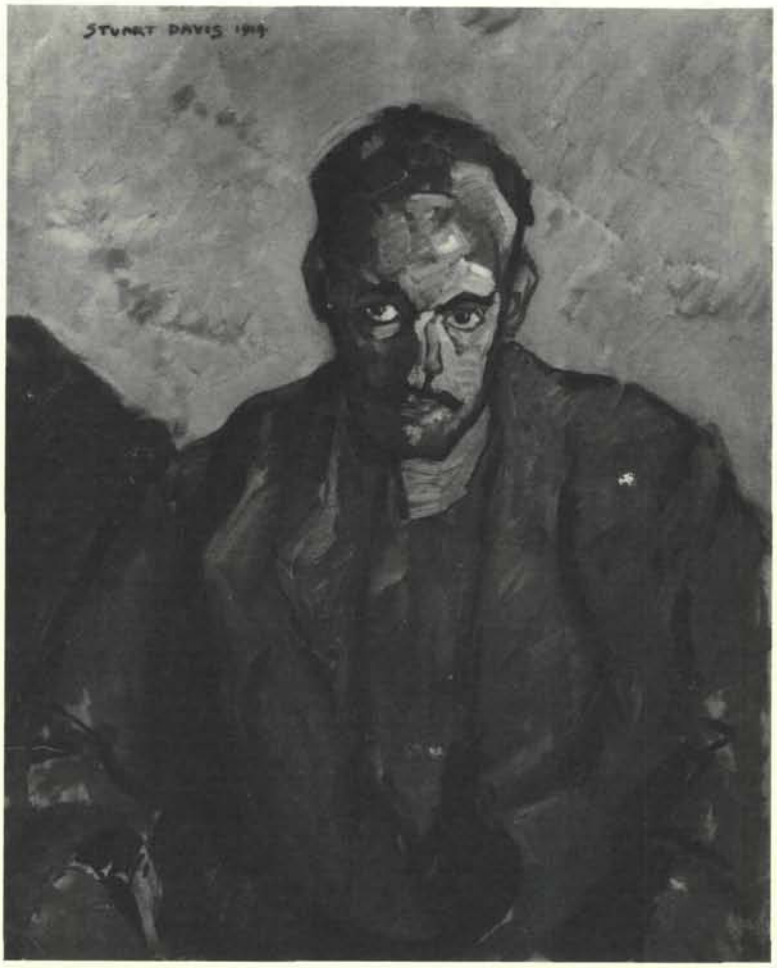

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